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The Best Short Stories

1940

English and American



Edited by

Edward J. O'Brien

London
Jonathan Cape

FIRST PUBLISHED 1941

JONATHAN CAPE LTD. 30 BEDFORD SQUARE, LONDON
AND 91 WELLINGTON STREET WEST, TORONTO

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN IN THE CITY OF OXFORD
AT THE ALDEN PRESS
PAPER MADE BY JOHN DICKINSON & CO. LTD.
BOUND BY A. W. BAIN & CO. LTD.

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Introduction

TO repeat what I have said in these pages in previous years, for the benefit of the reader as yet unacquainted with my standards and principles of selection, I shall point out that I have set myself the task of disengaging the essential human qualities in our contemporary fiction, which, when chronicled conscientiously by our literary artists, may fairly be called a criticism of life. I am not at all interested in formulæ, and organized criticism at its best would be nothing more than dead criticism, as all dogmatic interpretation of life is always dead. What has interested me, to the exclusion of other things, is the fresh, living current which flows through the best contemporary work, and the psychological and imaginative quality which contemporary writers have conferred upon it.

No substance is of importance in fiction unless it is organic substance, that is to say, substance in which the pulse of life is beating. Inorganic fiction has been our curse in the past, and bids fair to remain so, unless we exercise much greater artistic discrimination than we display at present.

During the past year I have sought to select those stories which have rendered life imaginatively in organic substance and artistic form. Substance is something achieved by the artist in every act of creation, rather than something already present, and accordingly a fact or group of facts in a story only attains substantial embodiment when the artist's power of compelling imaginative persuasion transforms them into a living truth. The first test of a short story, therefore, in any qualitative analysis, is to decide how vitally compelling the writer makes his selected facts or incidents. This may conveniently be called the test of substance.

But a second test is necessary if the story is to take rank above other stories. The true artist will seek to shape this living

substance into the most beautiful and satisfying form by skilful selection and arrangement of his materials, and by the most direct and appealing presentation of it in portrayal and characterization.

EDWARD J. O'BRIEN

To
WOODROW and SUSAN WYATT
with best wishes for
'English Story'
and to
IRWIN SHAW

THE BEST SHORT STORIES: 1940
English and Irish

'Come in, come in,' the landlord whispered, '*do* come in. She is cooking a *lovely* broth to-night!'

He turned and chuckled, holding the lamp above his head.

Through the doorway of this lost upland inn, Mr. Bond followed the monstrous back of his host. The passage widened and became a hall; and here, amongst the shadows that were gliding from their lurking-places as the lamp advanced, the landlord stopped, and tilted the flat of his hand in the air, as though enjoining his guest to listen. Then Mr. Bond disturbed the silence of the house with a sniff and a sigh. Not only could he smell the 'lovely broth' — already, in this outer hall, he tasted it . . . a complex and subtle flavour, pungent, heavy as honey, light as a web in the air, nipping him in the stomach, bringing tears into his eyes.

Mr. Bond stared at Crispin Sasserach, at the shadows beyond and back again to Crispin Sasserach. The man was standing there with his huge, oval, hairless face upturned in the light of the lamp he carried; then, impulsively, and as though reluctant to cut short such sweet anticipation, he plucked the traveller by the cape, and led him to the cheerful living-room, and introduced him, with a flourish of the hand, to Myrtle Sasserach, the landlord's young and small and busy wife, who at that very moment was standing at a round table of great size, beneath the massive centre-beam of the ceiling, her black hair gleaming in the light of many candles, her plump hand dipping a ladle soundlessly into a bowl of steam.

On seeing the woman, whose long lashes were once more directed towards the bowl, Mr. Bond drew his chin primly into his neck-cloth, and glanced from her to Crispin Sasserach, and finally he fixed his eyes on the revolutions of the ladle. In a moment, purpose fell upon the living-room, and with swift and nervous gestures the landlord seated his guest at the table, seized the ladle from his wife, plunged it into the bowl, and thrust the brimming plate into the hands of Myrtle, who began at once to walk towards the traveller, the steam of the broth rising into her grave eyes.

After a muttered grace, Mr. Bond pushed out his lips as though he were whispering 'spoon'.

'Oh, what a lovely broth!' he murmured, catching a drip in his handkerchief.

Crispin Sasserach grinned with delight. 'I always say it's the best in the world.' Whereupon, with a rush, he broke into peals of falsetto laughter, and blew a kiss towards his wife. A moment later, the two Sasserachs were leaving their guest to himself, bending over their own platesful of broth, and discussing domestic affairs, as though they had no other person sitting at their table. For some time their voices were scarcely louder than the sound of the broth-eating; but when the traveller's plate was empty, then, in a flash, Crispin Sasserach became again a loud and attentive host. 'Now, then, sir — another helping?' he suggested, picking up the ladle, and beaming down into the bowl, while Myrtle left her chair and walked a second time towards the guest.

Mr. Bond said that he would, and pulled his chair a little closer to the table. Into his blood and bones, life had returned with twice its accustomed vigour; his very feet were as light as though he had soaked them in a bath of pine needles.

'There you are, sir! Myrtle's coming! Lord a'mighty, how I wish I was tasting it for the first time!' Then, spreading his elbows, the landlord crouched over his own steaming plateful, and chuckled again. 'This broth is a wine in itself! It's a wine in itself, b'God! It staggers a man!' Flushed with excitement, his oval face looked larger than ever, and his auburn hair, whirled into bellicose corkscrews, seemed to burn brighter, as though someone had brought the bellows to it.

Stirred by the broth, Mr. Bond began to describe minutely his journey out of the valley. His voice grew as prosy, his words as involved, as though he were talking at home amongst his own people. 'Now, let me see — where was I?' he buzzed again and again. And later: 'I was very glad to see your light, I can tell you!' he chuckled. Then Crispin jumped up from the table, his small mouth pouting with laughter.

The evening shifted to the fireside. Fresh logs cracked like pistol shots as Crispin Sasserach dropped them into the flames. The traveller could wish for nothing better than to sit here by the hearth

talking plangently to Crispin, and slyly watching Myrtle as she cleared away the supper things; though, indeed, amongst his own people, Mr. Bond was thought to hold women in low esteem. He found her downcast eyes modest and even pretty. One by one she blew the candles out; with each extinguishment she grew more ethereal, while reaping a fuller share of the pagan firelight. 'Come and sit beside us now, and talk,' thought Mr. Bond, and presently she came.

They made him very comfortable. He found a log fire burning in his bedroom, and a bowl of broth on the bedside table. 'Oh, but they're overdoing it!' he cried aloud, petulantly; 'they're crude, crude! They're nothing but school-children!' — and, seizing the bowl, he emptied it on to the shaggy patch of garden beneath his window. The black wall of the forest seemed to stand within a few feet of his eyes. The room was filled with the mingled light of moon, fire, and candle.

Mr. Bond, eager at last for the dreamless rest, the abandoned sleep, of the traveller, turned and surveyed the room in which he was to spend the night. He saw with pleasure the four-poster bed, itself as large as a tiny room; the heavy oaken chairs and cupboards; the tall, twisting candlesticks, their candles burnt halfway, no doubt, by a previous guest; the ceiling, that he could touch with the flat of his hand. He touched it.

In the misty morning he could see no hint of the forest, and down the shallow staircase he found the hall thick with the odour of broth. The Sasserachs were seated already at the breakfast-table, like two children, eager to begin the day with their favourite food. Crispin Sasserach was lifting his spoon and pouting his lips, while Myrtle was stirring her ladle round the tureen, her eyes downcast; and Mr. Bond sighed inaudibly as he saw again the woman's dark and lustrous hair. He noticed also the flawless condition of the Sasserach skin. There was not a blemish to be seen on their two faces, on their four hands. He attributed this perfection to the beneficial qualities of the broth, no less than to the upland air; and he began to discuss, in his plangent voice, the subject of health in

general. In the middle of this discourse Crispin Sasserach remarked, excitedly, that he had a brother who kept an inn a day's journey along the edge of the forest.

'Oh,' said Mr. Bond, pricking up his ears, 'so you have a brother, have you?'

'Certainly,' whispered the innkeeper. 'It is most convenient.'

'Most convenient for what?'

'Why, for the inns. His name's Martin. We share our guests. We help each other. 'The proper brotherly spirit, b'God!'

Mr. Bond stared angrily into his broth. 'They share their guests . . . But what,' he thought, 'has that to do with me?' He said aloud: 'Perhaps I'll meet him one day, Mr. Sasserach.'

'To-day!' cried Crispin, whacking his spoon on to the table. 'I'm taking you there to-day! But don't you worry,' he added, seeing the look on the other's face, and flattering himself that he had read it aright; 'you'll be coming back to us! Don't you worry! Day after to-morrow — day after that — one of these days! Ain't that right, Myr? Ain't that right?' he repeated, bouncing up and down in his chair like a big child.

'Quite right,' answered Myrtle Sasserach to Mr. Bond, whose eyes were fixed upon her with heavy attention.

A moment later the innkeeper was out of his chair, making for the hall, calling back to Myrtle to have his boots ready. In the midst of this bustle, Mr. Bond bowed stiffly to Myrtle Sasserach, and found his way with dignity to the back garden, that now appeared wilder than he had supposed — a fenced-in plot of grass reaching above his knees and scattered with burdock whose prickly heads clung to his clothes as he made for the gate in the fence at the foot of this wilderness. He blinked his eyes, and walked on the rough turf that lay between him and the forest. By this time the sun was shining in an unclouded sky; a fine day was at hand; and Mr. Bond was sweeping his eye along the endless wall of the forest when he heard the innkeeper's voice calling to him in the stillness. 'Mr. Bond! Mr. Bond!' Turning reluctantly, and stepping carefully through the garden in order to avoid the burrs of the burdock, the traveller found Crispin Sasserach on the point of departure, in

a great bustle, with a strong horse harnessed to a two-wheeled cart, and his wife putting up her face to be kissed.

'Yes, I'll go with you,' cried Mr. Bond, but the Sasserachs did not appear to hear him. He lingered for a moment in the porch, scowling at Myrtle's back, scowling at the large young horse that seemed to toss its head at him with almost human insolence; then he sighed, and, slinging his knapsack over his shoulder, sat himself beside the driver; the horse was uncommonly large, restless between the shafts, and in perfect fettle; and without a word from Crispin the animal began to plunge forward rapidly over the worn track.

For some time the two men drove in silence, on the second stage of Mr. Bond's adventure above the valley. The traveller sat up stiffly, inflating his lungs methodically, glaring through his small eyes, and forcing back his shoulders. Presently he began to talk about the mountain air, and received no answer. On his right hand the wall of the forest extended as far as his eyes could see; while on his left hand ran the brink of the valley, a mile away, broken here and there by rowan trees.

The monotony of the landscape, and the continued silence of the innkeeper, soon began to pall on Mr. Bond, who liked talking and was seldom at ease unless his eyes were busy picking out new things. Even the horse behaved with the soundless regularity of a machine; so that, besides the traveller, only the sky showed a struggle to make progress. Clouds came from nowhere, shaped and broke, and at midday the sun in full swing was riding between white puffs of cloud, glistening by fits and starts on the moist coat of the horse. The forest beneath, and the stretch of coarse grass running to the valley, were constantly shining and darkening, yet Crispin Sasserach never opened his mouth, even to whisper, though sometimes, between his teeth, he spat soundlessly over the edge of the cart. The landlord had brought with him a casserole of the broth; and during one of these sunny breaks he pulled up the horse, without a word, and poured the liquor into two pannikins, which he proceeded to heat patiently over a spirit stove.

In the failing light of the afternoon, when the horse was still

making his top speed, when Crispin Sasserach was buzzing fitfully between his teeth, and sleep was flirting with the traveller, a shape appeared obscurely on the track ahead, and with it came the growing jingle of bells. Mr. Bond sat up and stared. He had not expected to meet, in such a God-forsaken spot, another cart, or carriage. He saw at length, approaching him, a four-wheeled buggy, drawn by two sprightly horses in tandem. A thin-faced man in breeches and a bowler hat was driving it. The two drivers greeted each other solemnly, raised their whips, but never slackened speed.

'Well -- who was that?' asked Mr. Bond, after a pause.

'My brother Martin's manservant.'

'Where is he going?' asked Mr. Bond..

'To The Rest of the Traveller. With news.'

'Indeed? What news?' persisted Mr. Bond.

The landlord turned his head.

'News for my Myrtle,' he whispered, winking at the traveller.

Mr. Bond shrugged his shoulders. 'What is the use of talking to such a boor?' he thought, and fell once more into his doze; the harvest moon climbed up again, whitening the earth; while now and then the landlord spat towards the forest, and never spoke another word until he came to Martin Sasserach's.

Then Crispin leapt to life.

'Out with you!' he cried. 'Pst! Mr. Bond! Wake up! Get out at once! We've reached The Headless Man, sir!'

Mr. Bond, staggered by so much energy, flopped to the ground. His head felt as large as the moon. He heard the horse panting softly, and saw the breath from its nostrils flickering upwards in the cold air. And as though this acre of the world had become a circus-ring, there was the white-faced Crispin Sasserach leaping about under the moon; the figure was whistling between its teeth, and calling out enthusiastically: 'Mar-tin! Mar-tin! Here he is!'

The sheer wall of forest echoed back the name. Indeed, the whole of the moonlight seemed to be filled with the name 'Martin'; and Mr. Bond had a fierce desire to see this Martin Sasserach whose sign was hanging high above the traveller's head. After

repeated calls from Crispin, the landlord of The Headless Man appeared, and Mr. Bond, expecting a very giant in physical stature, was shocked to see the small and bespectacled figure that had emerged at leisure from the house. Crispin Sasserach grew quick and calm in a moment. 'Meet again,' he whispered to Mr. Bond, shutting his eyes, and stretching his small mouth as though in ecstasy; then he gave the traveller a push towards the approaching Martin, and a moment later he was in his cart, and the horse was springing its way back to The Rest of the Traveller.

Mr. Bond stood where he was, listening to the dying sound of the horse, and watching the landlord of The Headless Man; and presently he was staring at two grey flickering eyes behind the landlord's glasses.

'Anyone arriving at my inn from my brother's is trebly welcome. He is welcome not only for Crispin's own sake and mine, but also for the sake of our brother Stephen.' The voice was as quiet and as clear and as brittle as the moonlight, and the speaker began to return to his inn with scarcely a pause between speech and movement. Mr. Bond examined curiously the strongly lighted hall that in shape and size was the very double of Crispin's. Oil-lamps, gracefully columned, gleamed almost as brightly from their fluted silver surfaces as from their opal-lighted heads; and there was Martin stooping up the very stairs, it seemed, that Mr. Bond had walked at Crispin Sasserach's — a scanty man, this brother, throwing out monstrous shadows, turning once to peer back at his guest, and standing at last in a bright and airy bedroom, where, with courteous words from which his eyes, lost in thought and gently flickering, seemed to be far distant, he invited his guest to wash before dining.

Martin Sasserach fed Mr. Bond delicately on that evening of his arrival, presenting him with small, cold dishes of various kinds and always exquisitely cooked and garnished; and these, together with the almost crystalline cleanliness of the room and of the table, seemed appropriate to the chemist-like appearance of the host. A bottle of wine was opened for Mr. Bond, who, amongst his own people, was known to drink nothing headier than bottled cider.

During dinner, the wine warmed up a brief moment of attention in Martin Sasserach. He peered with sudden interest at his guest. 'The Headless Man? There is, in fact, a story connected with that name. If you can call it a story.' He smiled briefly, tapping his finger, and a moment later was examining an ivory piece, elaborately carved, that held the bill of fare. 'Lovely! Lovely! Isn't it? . . . In fact, there are many stories,' he ended, as though the number of stories excused him from wasting his thought over the recital of merely one. Soon after dinner he retired, alluding distantly to work from which he never liked to be away long.

Mr. Bond went to bed early that night, suffering from dyspepsia, and glowering at the absence of home comforts in his bright and efficient bedroom.

The birds awakened him to a brisk, autumnal morning. Breathing heavily, he told himself that he was always very fond of birds and trees and flowers; and soon he was walking sleepily in Martin Sasserach's garden. The trimness of the beds began to please him. He followed the right-angled paths with dignified obesity, his very bones were proud to be alive. A green gate at the garden-foot attracted Mr. Bond's attention; but, knowing that it would lead him on to the wild grass beyond, and thence to the forest, whose motionless crest could be seen all this while over the privet hedge, he chose to linger where he was, sniffing the clear scent of the flowers, and losing, with every breath and step, another whiff of Crispin's broth, to his intense delight.

Hunger drew him back into the house at last, and he began to pace the twilit rooms. Martin Sasserach, he saw, was very fond of ivory. He stooped and peered at the delicate things. Ivory objects of every description, perfectly carved: paper-knives, chessmen, salad-spoons; tiny busts and faces, often of grotesque appearance; and even delicate boxes, fretted from ivory.

The echo of his feet on the polished floors intensified the silence of 'The Headless Man; yet even this indoor hush was full of sound, when compared with the stillness of the scene beyond the uncurtained windows. The tufted grass was not yet lighted by the direct rays of the sun. The traveller stared towards the rowan trees that

stood on the brink of the valley. Beyond them stretched a carpet of mist, raising the rest of the world to the height of the plateau; and Mr. Bond, recalling the house and town that he had left behind him, began to wonder whether he was glad or sorry that his adventures had brought him to this lost region. 'Cold enough for my cape,' he shivered, fetching it from the hall and hurrying out of the inn; the desire had seized him to walk on the tufted grass, to foot it as far as the trees; and he had indeed gone some distance on his journey, wrapped in his thoughts and antique Inverness cape, when the note of a gong came up behind him, like a thread waving on the air.

'Hark at that,' he whispered, staring hard at the ragged line of rowan trees on which his heart was set; then he shrugged his shoulders, and turned back to The Headless Man, where his host was standing lost in thought at the breakfast-table that still held the crumbs of the night before.

'Ah, yes. Yes. It's you . . . You slept well?'

'Tolerably well,' said Mr. Bond.

'We breakfast rather early here. It makes a longer day. Stennet will be back later. He's gone to my brother Crispin's.'

'With news?' said Mr. Bond.

Martin Sasserach bowed courteously, though a trifle stiffly. He motioned his guest towards a chair at the table. Breakfast was cold and short and silent. Words were delicate things to rear in this crystalline atmosphere. Martin's skin sagged and was the colour of old ivory. Now and then he looked up at his guest, his grey eyes focused beyond mere externals; and it seemed as though they lodged themselves in Mr. Bond's very bones. On one of these occasions the traveller made great play with his appetite. 'It's all this upland air,' he asserted, thumping his chest.

The sun began to rise above the plateau. Again the landlord vanished, murmuring his excuses; silence flooded The Headless Man, the garden purred in the full blaze of the sun that now stood higher than the forest, and the gravelled paths crunched slowly beneath Mr. Bond's feet. 'News for Myrtle,' he pondered, letting his thoughts stray back over his journey; and frequently he drifted

through the house where all was still and spacious: dusty, museum-like rooms brimming with sunlight, while everywhere those ivory carvings caught his eye, possessing his sight as completely as the taste of Crispin's broth had lodged in his very lungs.

Lunch was yet another meal of cold food and silence, broken only by coffee that the landlord heated on a spirit stove at the end of the table, and by a question from the traveller, to which this thin-haired Martin, delicately flicking certain greyish dust off the front of his coat and sleeve, replied that he had been a collector of carvings for years past, and was continually adding to his collection. His voice drew out in length and seemed, in fact, to trail him from the sunlit dining-room, back to his everlasting work . . . and now the afternoon itself began to drag and presently to settle down in the sun as though the whole of time were dozing.

'Here's my indigestion back again,' sighed Mr. Bond, mooning about. At home he would have rested in his bedroom, with its pink curtains and flowered wallpaper.

He crept into the garden, and eyed the back of the house. Which of those windows in the trimly creepered stone lit up the landlord and his work? He listened for the whirring of a lathe, the scraping of a knife . . . and wondered, startled, why he had expected to hear such things. He felt the forest behind his back, and turned, and saw it looming above the privet hedge. Impulsively, he started to cross the sun-swept grass beyond the gate: but within a few yards of the forest his courage failed him again: he could not face the wall of trees: and with a cry he fled into the house, and seized his Inverness.

His eyes looked far beyond the rowans on the skyline as he plodded over the tufted grass. Already he could see himself down there below, counties and counties away, on the valley level, in the house of his neighbours the Allcards, drinking their coffee or tea and telling them of his adventure and especially of *this* adventure. It was not often that a man of his age and secure position in the world went off alone, in search of joy or trouble. He scanned the distant line of rowan trees, and nodded, harking back: 'As far as it has gone. I'll tell them this adventure, as far as it ever went.'

And he would say to them: 'The things I might have seen, if I had stayed! Yes, Allcard, I was very glad to climb down into the valley that day, I can tell you! I don't mind admitting I was a bit frightened!'

The tippet of his cape caressed his shoulders, like the hand of a friend.

Mr. Bond was not yet half-way to the rowan trees when, looking back, he saw, against the darkness of the forest wall, a carriage rapidly approaching The Headless Man. At once there flashed into his memory the eyes of the manservant Stennet who went between the Sasserach inns.

He knew that Stennet's eyes were on him now. 'The sound of the horses' feet was coming up to him like a soft ball bouncing over the grass. Mr. Bond shrugged his shoulders, and stroked his pendulous cheeks. Already he was on his way back to The Headless Man, conscious that two flying horses could have overtaken him long before he had reached the rowans. 'But why,' he thought, holding himself with dignity, 'should I imagine that these people are expecting me to run away? And why that sudden panic in the garden? It's all that deathly quietness of the morning getting on my nerves.'

The carriage had disappeared some time before he reached the inn, over whose tiled and weather-stained roof the redness of the evening was beginning to settle. And now the traveller was conscious of a welcome that seemed to run out and meet him at the very door. He found a log fire crackling in the dining-room; and Mr. Bond, holding his hands to the blaze, felt suddenly at ease, and weary. He had intended to assert himself — to shout for Martin Sasserach — to demand that he be escorted down at once from the plateau . . . but now he wished for nothing better than to stand in front of the fire, waiting for Stennet to bring him tea.

A man began to sing in the heart of the house. Stennet? The fellow's eyes and hawklike nose were suddenly visible in the fire. The singing voice grew louder . . . died at length discreetly into silence and the tread of footsteps in the hall . . . and again the traveller was listening to the flames as they roared in the chimney.

'Let me take your coat, sir,' Stennet said.

Then Mr. Bond whipped round, his cheeks shaking with anger.

Why did they want to force this hospitality upon him, making him feel like a prisoner? He glared at the large-checked riding-breeches, at the muscular shoulders, at the face that seemed to have grown the sharper through swift driving. He almost shouted, 'Where's that bowler hat?'

Fear? . . . Perhaps . . . But if fear had clutched him for a moment, it had left him now. He knew that the voice had pleased him, a voice of deference breaking into the cold and irreverent silence of The Headless Man. The cape was already off his shoulders, hanging on Stennet's bent and respectful arm. And — God be praised! — the voice was announcing that tea would be ready soon. Mr. Bond's spirits leapt with the word. He and Stennet stood there, confidentially plotting. 'China? Yes, sir. We have China,' Stennet said.

'And buttered toast,' said Mr. Bond, softly rubbing his chin. Some time after tea he was awakened from his doze by the hand of the manservant, who told him that a can of boiling water was waiting in his room.

Mr. Bond felt that dinner would be a rich meal that night, and it was. He blushed as the dishes were put before him. Hare soup! How did they know his favourite soup? Through entrée, remove and roast, his hands, soft and pink from washing, were busier than they had been for days. The chicken was braised to a turn. Oh, what mushrooms *au gratin*! The partridge brought tears to his eyes. The Saxony pudding caused him to turn again to Martin, in Stennet's praise.

The landlord bowed with distant courtesy. 'A game of chess?' he suggested, when dinner was over. 'My last opponent was a man like yourself, a traveller making a tour of the inns. We started a game. He is gone from us now. Perhaps you will take his place?' smiled Martin Sasserach, his precise voice dropping and seeming to transmit its flow of action to the thin hand poised above the board. 'My move,' he whispered, playing at once; he had thought it out for a week. But although Mr. Bond tried to sink his thoughts into the problem so suddenly placed before him, he could not take

them off his after-dinner dyspepsia, and with apologies and groans he scraped back his chair. 'I'm sorry for that,' smiled Martin, and his eyes flickered over the board. 'I'm very sorry. Another night . . . undoubtedly . . . with your kind help . . . another night. . . '

The prospect of another day at The Headless Man was at once disturbing and pleasant to Mr. Bond as he went wheezing up to bed.

'Ah, Stennet! Do *you* ever suffer from dyspepsia?' he asked mournfully, seeing the man at the head of the staircase. Stennet snapped his fingers, and was off downstairs in a moment; and a minute later he was standing at the traveller's door, with a bowl of Crispin's famous broth. 'Oh, that!' cried Mr. Bond, staring down at the bowl. Then he remembered its fine effect on his indigestion at Crispin's; and when at last he pulled the sheets over his head, he fell asleep in comfort and did not wake until the morning.

At breakfast Martin Sasserach looked up from his plate.

'This afternoon,' he murmured, 'Stennet will be driving you to my brother Stephen's.'

Mr. Bond opened his eyes. 'Another inn? Another of you Sasserachs?'

'Crispin — Martin — Stephen. Just the three of us. A perfect number . . . if you come to think of it.'

The traveller strode into the garden. Asters glowed in the lustreless light of the morning. By ten o'clock the sun was shining again, and by midday a summer heat lay on the plateau, penetrating even into Mr. Bond's room. The silence of the forest pulled him to the window, made him lift up his head and shut his eyes upon that monstrous mass of trees. Fear was trying to overpower him. He did not want to go to Stephen Sasserach's; but the hours were running past him quickly now, the old stagnation was gone from the inn.

At lunch, to which his host contributed a flow of gentle talk, the traveller felt rising within him an impatience to be off on the third stage of his journey, if such a stage must be. He jumped up from his chair without apology, and strode into the garden. The asters were now shining dimly in the strong sunlight. He opened the gate

in the privet hedge, and walked on to the tufted grass that lay between it and the forest. As he did so, he heard the flap of a wing behind him, and saw a pigeon flying from a window in the roof. The bird flew over his head and over the forest and out of sight; and his thoughts were still following the pigeon over the boundless floor of tree-tops when he heard a voice calling to him in the silence. 'Mr. Bond! Mr. Bond!' He walked at once to the gate and down the garden and into the house, put on his Inverness, and hitched his knapsack on to his shoulder; and in a short while he was perched beside Stennet in the flying buggy, staring at the ears of the two horses, and remembering that Martin, at the last moment, instead of bidding his guest good-bye, had gone back to his work.

Though he never lost his fear of Stennet, Mr. Bond found Martin's man a good companion on a journey, always ready to speak when spoken to, and even able to arouse the traveller's curiosity, at times, in the monotonous landscape.

'See those rowans over there?' said Stennet, nodding to the left. 'Those rowans belong to Mr. Martin. He owns them halfway back to Mr. Crispin's place, and halfway on to Mr. Stephen's. And so it is with Mr. Crispin and Mr. Stephen in their turn.'

'And what about the forest?'

'Same again,' said Stennet, waving his hand towards the right. 'It's round, you know. And they each own a third, like a huge slice of cake.'

He clicked his tongue, and the horses pricked up their ears, though on either side of the dashboard the performance was no more than a formality, so swiftly was the buggy moving. 'Very much quicker than Crispin's cart!' gasped the passenger, feeling the wind against his face; yet, when the evening of the autumn day was closing in, he looked about him with surprise.

He saw the moon rise up above the valley.

Later still, he asked for information regarding the names of the three inns, and Stennet laughed.

'The gentlemen are mighty proud of them, I can tell you!

Romantic and a bit fearsome, that's what I call them. Poetical, too. They don't say "The Traveller's Rest", but "The Rest of the Traveller", mind you. That's poetical. I don't think it was Mr. Crispin's idea. I think it was Mr. Martin's — or Mrs. Crispin's. They're the clever ones.' The Headless Man is merely grim — a grim turn of mind, Mr. Martin has — and it means, of course, no more than it says — a man without a head. And then again,' continued Stennet, whistling to his horses, whose backs were gleaming in the moonlight, 'the inn you're going to now — The Traveller's Head — well, inns are called The King's Head sometimes aren't they, in the King's honour? Mr. Stephen goes one better than that. He dedicates his inn to the traveller himself.' By this time a spark of light had become visible in the distance, and Mr. Bond fixed his eyes upon it. Once, for a moment, the spark went out, and he imagined that Stephen's head had passed in front of the living-room lamp. At this picture, anger seized him, and he wondered, amazed, why he was submitting so tamely to the commands — he could call them no less — of these oddly hospitable brothers. Fanned by his rage, the spark grew steadily bigger and brighter, until at last it had achieved the shape and size of a glowing window through which a man's face was grinning into the moonshine.

'Look here, what's all this?' cried Mr. Bond, starting from his fit of abstraction, and sliding to his feet.

'The Traveller's Head, sir,' answered Stennet, pointing aloft.

They both stared up at the sign above their heads; then Mr. Bond scanned the sprawling mass of the inn, and scowled at its surroundings. The night was still and vibrant, without sound; the endless forest stood like a wall of blue-white dust; and the traveller was about to raise his voice in wrath against the brothers Sasserach, when a commotion burst from the porch of the inn, and on to the moon-drenched grass there strode a tall and ungainly figure, swinging its arms, with a pack of creatures flopping and tumbling at its heels. 'Here is Mr. Stephen,' Stennet whispered, watching the approach; the landlord of The Traveller's Head was smiling pleasantly, baring his intensely white teeth, and when he had

reached the traveller he touched his forehead with a gesture that was at once respectful and overbearing.

'Mr. Bond, sir?' Mr. Bond muttered and bowed, and stared down at the landlord's children — large-headed, large-bellied, primitive creatures flopping round their father and pulling the skirts of the Inverness cape.

Father and children gathered round the traveller, who, lost within this little crowd, soon found himself at the entrance of The Traveller's Head, through which his new host urged him by the arm while two of the children pushed between them and ran ahead clumsily into the depths of the hall. The place was ill-lighted and ill-ventilated; and although Mr. Bond knew from experience exactly where the living-room would be situated, yet, after he had passed through its doorway, he found no further resemblance to those rooms wherein he had spent two stages of a curious adventure. The oil-lamp, standing in the centre of the round centre table, was without a shade; a moth was plunging audibly at the blackened chimney, hurling swift shadows everywhere over the ceiling and figured wallpaper, while, with the return of the children, a harmonium had started fitfully to grunt and blow.

'Let me take your cloak, your cape, Mr. Bond, sir,' said the landlord, and spread it with surprising care on one of the vast sofas that looked the larger because of their broken springs and the stuffing that protruded through their soiled covers: but at once the children seized upon the cape, and would have torn it to pieces had not Mr. Bond snatched it from them — at this, they cowered away from the stranger, fixing him with their eyes.

Amidst this congestion of people and furniture, Stephen Sasserach smiled and moved continuously, a stooping giant whom none but Mr. Bond obeyed. Here was the type of man whose appearance the traveller likened to that of the old-time executioner, the axe-man of the Middle Ages — harsh, loyal, simple, excessively domesticated, with a bulging forehead and untidy eyebrows and arms muscled and ready for deeds. Stephen kept no order in his house. Noise was everywhere, yet little seemed to be done. The children called their father Steve, and put out their

tongues at him. They themselves were unlovely things, and their inner natures seemed to ooze through their skins and form a surface from which the traveller recoiled. Three of their names were familiar to Mr. Bond. Here were Crispin and Martin and Stephen over again; while Dorcas and Lydia were sisters whose only virtue was their mutual devotion.

The food at 'The Traveller's Head' was homely and palatable, and Stephen the father cooked it and served it liberally on chipped plates. He sat in his soiled blue shirt, his knotted arms looking richly sunburnt against the blue. He was never inarticulate, and this surprised Mr. Bond. On the contrary, he spoke rapidly and almost as if to himself, in a low, rugged voice that was always a pleasure to hear. At moments he dropped into silence, his eyes shut, his eyebrows lowered, and his bulging forehead grew still more shiny with thought; on such occasions, Dorcas and Lydia would steal to the harmonium, while, backed by a wail from the instrument, Crispin the Younger and Martin the Younger would jump from the sofas on to the floor.

Rousing himself at last, Stephen the Elder thumped his fist on the table, and turned in his chair to shout at the children: 'Get along with you, devils! Get out your board, and *practise*, you little devils!' Whereupon the children erected a huge board, punctured with holes; and each child began to hurl wooden balls through the holes and into the pockets behind them, with astonishing accuracy, except for Dorcas and Lydia. And presently their father reminded them: 'The moon is shining!' At once the children scuttled out of the room, and Mr. Bond never saw them again.

The noise and the figured wallpaper and the fat moth beating itself against the only source of light had caused the traveller's head to grow heavy with sleep, and now it grew heavier still as he sat by the fire with Stephen after supper was over, listening to the talk of that strangely attractive man in the soiled blue shirt.

'You fond of children, Mr. Bond, sir?'

Mr. Bond nodded. 'Children and animals . . .' he murmured drowsily.

'One has to let them have their way,' sighed Stephen Sasserach. The rugged voice came clearly and soothingly into Mr. Bond's ears, until at last it shot up, vigorously, and ordered the guest to bed. Mr. Bond pulled himself out of his chair, and smiled, and said good night, and the moth flew into his face. Where were the children, he wondered. Their voices could not be heard. Perhaps they had fallen asleep, suddenly, like animals. But Mr. Bond found it difficult to imagine those eyes in bed, asleep.

Lying, some minutes later, in his own massive bed in this third of the Sasserach inns, with an extinguished candle on his bedside table, and gazing towards the open window from which he had drawn apart one of the heavy embroidered curtains, Mr. Bond fancied that he could hear faint cries of triumph, and sounds of knocking, coming from the direction of the forest. Starting up into complete wakefulness, he went to the window, and stared at the forest beyond the tufted grass. The sounds, he fancied, putting his hand to his ear, were as those given forth by the children during their game — but louder, as though the game were bigger. Perhaps strange animals were uttering them. Whatever their origin, they were coming from that depth of trees whose stillness was deepened by the light of the moon.

'Oh, God!' thought Mr. Bond, 'I'm sick to death of the moon-light!' and with a sweep of the arm he closed the curtains, yet could not shut out the sounds of the forest, nor the sight of the frosted grass beneath the moon. Together, sound and sight filled him with foreboding, and his cheeks shook as he groped for the unlighted candle. He must fetch his Inverness from below, fetch it at once, and get away while there was time. He found his host still sitting by the lamp in the living-room. Stephen's fist, lying on the table, was closed: he opened it, and out flew the moth.

'He thinks he has got away,' cried Stephen, looking up, and baring his teeth in a smile; 'but he hasn't! He never will!'

'I've come for my Inverness,' said Mr. Bond.

It was lying on one of the massive sofas. The fire was out, and the air chilly, and the depth of the room lay in darkness. An idea crossed the mind of Mr. Bond. He said, lifting up the cape, 'I

thought I'd like it on my bed.' And he shivered to show how cold he was. From one of the folds the moth flew out, and whirled round the room like a mad thing.

'That's all right, Mr. Bond, sir. That's all right.' The man had fallen into a mood of abstraction; his forehead shone in the rays of the lamp; and the traveller left the room, holding himself with dignity in his gay dressing-gown, the Inverness hanging on his arm.

He was about to climb the staircase when a voice spoke softly in his ear, and wished him good night.

Stennet! What was the man doing here? Mr. Bond lifted his candle and gazed in astonishment at the back of Martin's manservant. The figure passed into the shadows, and the soft and deliberate ticking of the grandfather clock in the hall deepened the silence and fear of the moments that followed.

Mr. Bond ran to his room, locked himself in, and began to dress. His indigestion had seized him again. Inside and out, he was assailed by enemies. He parted the curtains, and peeped at the night. The shadow of the inn lay on the yard and the tufted grass beyond, and one of the chimneys, immensely distorted, extended as far as the forest. The forest-wall itself was solid with moonlight; from behind it there came no longer the sounds of the knocking, and the silence set Mr. Bond trembling again.

'I shall escape at dawn,' he whispered, 'when the moon's gone down.'

Feeling no longer sleepy, he took from his knapsack a volume of Mungo Park, and, fully dressed, settled himself in an easy chair, with the curtains drawn again across the window, and the candle burning close beside him. At intervals he looked up from his book, frowning, running his eyes over the group of three pagodas, in pale red, endlessly repeated on the wallpaper. The restful picture made him drowsy, and presently he slept and snored and the candle burned on.

At midnight he was awakened by crashing blows on his door; the very candle seemed to be jumping with fear, and Mr. Bond sprang up in alarm.

'Yes? Who's that?' he called out, feebly.

'What in the name of God is *that?*' he whispered, as the blows grew louder.

'What are they up to now?' he asked aloud, with rising terror.

A splinter flew into the room, and he knew in a flash that the end of his journey had come. Was it Stephen or Stennet, Stephen or Stennet behind the door? The candle flickered as he blundered to and fro. He had no time to think, no time to act. He stood and watched the corner of the axe-blade working in the crack in the panel. 'Save me, save me,' he whispered, wringing his hands. They fluttered towards his Inverness, and struggled to push themselves into the obstinate sleeves. 'Oh, come on, come on,' he whimpered, jerking his arms about, anger rising with terror. The whole room shuddered beneath the axe. He plunged at the candle and blew it out. In the darkness a ray of light shot through a crack in the door, and fell on the window curtain.

Mr. Bond remembered the creeper clinging beneath his window, and as soon as possible he was floundering, scrambling, slipping down to the house-shadowed garden below. Puffing out his cheeks, he hurried onward, while the thuds of the axe grew fainter in his ears. Brickbats lay in his path, a zinc tub wrenched at his cape and ripped it loudly, an iron hoop caught in his foot and he tottered forward with outstretched hands. And now, still running in the far-flung shadow of the house, he was on the tufted grass, whimpering a little, struggling against desire to look back over his shoulder, making for the forest that lay in the full beams of the moonlight. He tried to think, and could think of nothing but the size and safety of the shadow on which he was running. He reached the roof of the inn at last: plunged aside from his course of flight: and now he was running up the monstrous shadow of the chimney, thinking of nothing at all because the forest stood so near. Blindly, a moon-filled avenue stretched before him: the chimney entered the chasm, and stopped: and it was as though Mr. Bond were a puff of smoke blowing into the forest depths. His shadow, swinging its monstrously distorted garments, led

him to an open space at the end of the avenue. The thick-set trees encircled it with silence deeper than any that Mr. Bond had known. Here, in this glade, hung silence within a silence. Yet, halting abruptly, and pressing the flat of his hands to his ribs in the pain of his sudden burst of breathing, Mr. Bond had no ears for the silence, nor eyes for anything beyond the scene that faced him in the centre of the forest glade: a group of upright posts, or stakes, set in a concave semicircle, throwing long shadows, and bearing on each summit a human skull. 'The 'Traveller's Head, The Headless Man', he whispered, stricken with terror, whipping his back on the skulls; and there was Stephen Sasserach, in silhouette, leaping up the avenue, brandishing his axe, as though he were a demented wood-cutter coming to cut down trees.

The traveller's mind continued to run swiftly through the names of the three inns. 'The Traveller's Head,' he thought, 'The Headless Man, The Rest of the Traveller.' He remembered the carrier pigeon that had flown ahead of him from Martin's; he remembered the dust on the front of Martin's coat. . . .

He was staring at the figure in the soiled blue shirt. It had halted now, as still as a tree, on the verge of the moon-filled glade: but the whirling thoughts of Mr. Bond were on the verge of light more blinding than this; they stopped, appalled: and the traveller fled beyond the skulls, fruitlessly searching for covert in the farthest wall of trees.

Then Stephen sprang in his wake, flinging up a cry that went knocking against the tree-trunks.

The echoes were echoed by Mr. Bond, who, whipping round to face his enemy, was wriggling and jerking anxiously in his Inverness cape, slipping it off at last, and swinging it in his hand, for his blood was up. And now he was deep in mortal combat, wielding his Inverness as the gladiators used to wield their nets in the old arenas. Time and again the axe and the cape engaged each other; the one warding and hindering; the other catching and ripping, clumsily enough, as though in sport. Around the skulls the two men fought and panted, now in darkness, now in the full light pouring down the avenue. Their moon-cast shadows fought another

fight together, wilder still than theirs. Then Stephen cried, 'Enough of this!' and bared his teeth for the first time since the strife had started.

'But — but you're my friend!' bleated Mr. Bond; and he stared at the shining thread of the axe.

'The best you ever had, sir, Mr. Bond, sir!' answered Stephen Sasserach; and, stepping back, the landlord of The Traveller's Head cut off the traveller's head.

The thump of the head on the sticks and leaves and grass of the forest glade was the first sound in the new and peaceful life of Mr. Bond, and he did not hear it; but to the brothers Sasserach it was a promise of life itself, a signal that all was ready now for them to apply their respective talents busily and happily in the immediate future.

Stephen took the head of Mr. Bond, and with gentle though rather clumsy fingers pared it to a skull, grinning back at it with simple satisfaction when the deed was over, and after that he set it up as a fine mark for his brood of primitives, the game's endeavour being to see who could throw the ball into the eye-sockets; and to his brother Martin, landlord of The Headless Man, he sent the headless man, under the care of Stennet: and Martin, on a soft, autumnal day, reduced the headless body to a skeleton, with all its troubles gone, and through the days and nights he sat at work, with swift precision in his fingers, carving and turning, powdering his coat with dust, creating his figures and trinkets, his paper-knives and salad-spoons and fretted boxes and rare chessmen; and to his brother Crispin, landlord of The Rest of the Traveller, Martin sent the rest of the traveller, the soft and yielding parts, the scraps, the odds and ends, the miscellaneous pieces, all the internal lumber that had gone to fill the skin of the man from the Midlands and to help to render him in middle years a prey to dyspepsia.

Crispin received the parcel with a pursing of his small mouth, and a call to Myrtle in his clear falsetto: 'Stennet's here!'

She answered from the kitchen. 'Thank you, Cris!' Her hands

were soft and swollen as she scoured the tureen. The back of the inn was full of reflected sunlight, and her dark hair shone.

'It's too late in the season now,' she said, when tea-time came. 'I don't suppose we'll have another one before the spring.'

Yet she was wrong. That very evening, when the moon had risen from beyond the valley, Myrtle murmured, "There he comes," and continued to stir her ladle in the bowl.

Her husband strolled into the hall, and wound the clock.

He took the lamp from its bracket on the wall.

He went to the door, and flung it open to the moonlight, holding the lamp above his head.

'Come in, come in,' he said, to the stranger standing there; 'she is cooking a *lovely* broth to-night!'

The Bridge

BY H. E. BATES

(From *Horizon*)

I

THE summer my father died my sister and I decided to start a guest-house together. Of course we were fools, but I think we both thought it time to make something of the too-large red-brick family house where for so long there had been no family. Mother had been dead six years. Now, for the first time, we were feeling our independence.

All through that summer the weather was lovely. My father had died in March, and we spent the whole of May, June, and July replanning and redecorating the house, putting in new baths, central heating, even a second staircase. We hoped to be ready by August, and all through these weeks of clear dry weather we had every window open and there was that fine exhilarating smell of new paint and new wood in every corner of the house. My father had been a country solicitor of a solid and careful type who felt tradition to be of supreme importance in life. For that reason the disappointment of having two daughters had shaken him greatly, and although he had borne with my sister, who is older than I by seven years, he had never really been able to bear with me. I have always done my best to understand this and not bear him any ill-will because of it. He wanted sons to follow him in a profession where sons had followed for five generations, and to have had tradition broken by a girl who grew up to be a little irresponsible, rather self-centred, and highly impracticable was a shock from which he never properly recovered. He took a sort of revenge on me, whether by conscious or unconscious means I could never tell, by showing a certain partiality towards my sister. I was hurt by this partiality, but I have since tried to understand it too. What

I can't understand is why my father did not make the most revolutionary possible break with tradition and take my sister into the solicitor's profession with him. Dora would have made an admirable solicitor. She is utterly practical, resourceful, conscientious, and in a way very ingenious. (Her straight brown hair is and always has been parted directly in the middle: so straight and accurate and unchanging that it gives the feeling of being the result of a positive and ingenious mathematical calculation.) Her clear, rather white-skinned face has something of the same surely defined, uninspired character as a careful copperplate hand in a ledger.

I do not know quite what gave us this idea of a guest-house. Parkinford is just a small pleasant country town, with a thirteenth-century church and a row of old houses and a tiny square surrounded by sycamore-trees; the river flows past one end of the town, under a stone humpbacked bridge past irregular clumps of weeping willow that hang down like disentangled water-weed, brushing the water with their pale green branches in spring and summer. There was a time when I thought it a very dull town. Then I went away from it and — but I shall come to all that in a moment. All I wish to say now is that apart from the public-houses and a temperance commercial hotel down by the station we suddenly realized that our guest-house would be the only place where a certain class of tourist could get a room for the night. The fact that there were very few tourists who wanted to stop a night in Parkinford didn't discourage us; my sister quite rightly reasoned that it was our business to attract tourists. In time we should build up a reputation. Among other things my sister is a beautiful cook. She turns out tarts and pies and a great variety of dishes with the same ease and precise, mathematical beauty as she manipulates figures. I cannot cook at all, I haven't the slightest interest in mathematics, but I was young and, that first summer of the new boarding-house, I had no doubts about my own beauty. I had very thick, deeply waved blonde hair and clear blue eyes. I was full too of that deep emotional energy that springs naturally with youthful beauty — my heart full of it and hurting and not knowing where

to direct itself. There is a snapshot taken of me just about this time: it shows me in a short white dress standing in front of a large lime-tree at the back of the house. You can see in this picture a young, eager-looking girl with a smile on her face; but what you cannot see or hear or feel are the millions of delicate blossoms on the lime, the surge of bees in them, and the scented honey-dew falling on my hair and on my hands and on the brown summer grass. What this photograph does not show is the dreaming, urgent creature behind the gaiety and the beauty. It does not show how that young girl of twenty-two felt, dreaming and in love with herself and rather foolishly conscious of having a soul.

We opened the guest-house at last in the middle of August, and we started off immediately with two guests. One was a Mr. Bernard Parker, who had been my father's clerk for twenty years and had lived in disgraceful backroom lodgings most of the time and had never married; the other was a Miss Millay, librarian at the public library, a studious sort of girl who had been friendly with my sister for many years. These would form the permanent background for casual tourists, for which of course it was really too late that year.

Then, no sooner had we opened than we had a considerable shock. It was announced in the papers, and soon everyone was talking about it, that a new by-pass was to be constructed immediately on the south side, the river side, of Parkinford. This would not only cut out the old humpbacked bridge, but by means of a great new concrete bridge would span the river, the railway-line, and the meadows that were almost always flooded in winter. It was a project that had been talked of for years and the realization of which had been almost abandoned. Everyone was now very jubilant about it. It was only we who had reason to hate the thought of it. We felt that nothing could have smashed so completely our hopes of tourists and our hope for the future. My sister, less emotional than I, more balanced and more resourceful, took it with a sort of logical stoicism, but from the first I made up my mind I hated that bridge.

The project of the new bridge had been announced about a

month and preliminary work had already begun across the meadows by the river and the railway-line when something else happened. I had been down into the town shopping one evening, and I came back about seven o'clock to find my sister talking to a young man in what we called the reception room. He had two large leather suitcases with him and I knew, even before my sister spoke, that we had another guest.

'Oh! there you are, Linda,' my sister said. 'May I introduce Mr. Lawrence? Mr. Lawrence is coming to stay with us.'

'Oh!' I said. 'For long?'

'Well, for quite a time, I think,' he said. 'I've a job in the town that'll keep me busy for about eighteen months.'

'Oh! Good,' I said.

He looked at me and smiled. It was a curious smile. It gave me the strangest sort of feeling; the feeling that I had been singled out to receive it. There are some people who smile with the eyes, hardly moving the lips; others who show their teeth and keep the eyes immovable. 'This smile came from the slightest quiver of a mouth that did not open. I did not see it then, but it was a weak mouth. It was handsome and impertinent and it seemed to me to have all sorts of subtle and compelling qualities that were not analysable at a first glance, but you could see without thinking that it was vain and passionate and in a way sensitive too. I knew that I was right about the vanity. You could see that by the way he dressed: the smart grey suit, the brown suède shoes, the silk wine-red tie, the soft green Homburg hat. Oh! yes, you could see that he felt himself to be somebody that was somebody.

Instantly I didn't like him. I said something about I hoped he would be comfortable and he said 'I hope so,' almost mocking; and then my sister said she would show him to his room. He insisted on carrying his bags upstairs and in walking behind my sister. I must say that the back view of him was even more impressive than the front. It was curious how you got a feeling of jauntiness and class and vanity from the smooth cut of that grey suit and the even smoother sweep of his very black, oiled hair. It was curious how repellent and attractive it was.

My sister came down again in two or three minutes, and she said at once, 'Well, what do you think?'

'Well, he certainly doesn't undervalue himself,' I said.

'Linda,' she said, 'I think it ought to be our first rule not to criticize guests. We've set out to make a business proposition of this place, and personalities have got to be kept out.' That was just like Dora: sound and practical and admirably logical. 'The main point is whether he pays his bill. In any case it's a very good let — eighteen months. It will do something to compensate us for that wretched bridge.'

'I only hope we're good enough for him,' I said.

'Well, if you want my opinion,' she said, 'I think he's perfectly all right.'

'You didn't ask him what his job was?' I said.

'No, I didn't. That's something else we ought to avoid. Inquisitiveness. We'll find out soon enough what his job is.'

My sister was quite right. We did find out. Every morning, before breakfast, we had our separate jobs to do. Dora cooked breakfast and took up early morning tea to the guests; I prepared the tables and tidied the dining-room. We had only one servant, Elsie, and she would be busy stoking the boiler-fire and sweeping the hall and stairs. One of my jobs was to take in the morning papers and the post. The second morning I was surprised to see the size of Mr. Lawrence's correspondence: a dozen or more letters, one registered, and several large flat packages. One of these packages was marked *Ministry of Transport: Urgent*, and then I knew who and what he was.

Soon, of course, everyone knew what I knew. Everyone knew Mr. Lawrence, the government engineer in charge of the new bridge. And everyone, including even my sister, seemed quite honoured by the presence in Parkinford of a government engineer. In fact the instant reaction in Parkinford was a sort of emotional dog-fight — half the women became at once raving jealous over him. Even Elsie and Miss Millay were jealous.

My own instant reaction was quite simple. I hated him. At twenty-two it is possible to hate some person or object or creed

with a peculiarly pure, straightforward hatred, and to gain some kind of inverse pleasure from that hatred. This is how it was with J. Eric Lawrence and I. You will notice this J. Eric Lawrence — that's how he always styled himself: just that extra initial that put him a little above other men. I hated him more out of deliberation than out of any genuine feeling of revulsion. I cheated myself into thinking I hated him because more than anything he stood for the conception of the new bridge. He stood for something new and aloof and outside us and I took great pleasure in hating that something, whatever it was, tremendously. I also got a special feeling of pleasure out of behaving perversely. If J. Eric Lawrence was nice to me, as he could be so easily and often was, I took great pleasure in being despicably rude and aggravating towards him. I took great pains to be contemptuous of his precious bridge, although it did not begin to take shape until the following spring. Above all I was disappointed whenever he was not there, as I had hoped, to offer himself for one of my attacks. The strange thing was that he did not mind my hatred. He accepted it with a kind of amused amiability. He accepted it with that smile of his: that very handsome, vain, and important smile, with its flicker of impertinence.

There isn't much doubt, I think, that all this would have worn off gradually; this childish, mechanized hatred certainly couldn't have gone on for ever. But after J. Eric Lawrence had been with us about two months something else happened.

I began to notice a remarkable change in my sister.

II

From the first my sister had accepted J. Eric Lawrence with a sort of frank, businesslike cordiality. It was very natural that they had a great deal in common. My sister, with her mathematical, resourceful mind, could understand and be interested in and even become enthusiastic about an engineering project like a bridge. To some people arithmetic is, I suppose, a form of music, and the calculation and planning and creation of that bridge must have

had the quality of music to J. Eric Lawrence. And gradually and quite naturally my sister began to take an interest in that music. It began to have the deepest and most disturbing and most beautiful effect on her mind.

It was very strange how I first noticed this. My sister has never been given to very easy self-expression. Any other girl would have begun to express reactions of love and happiness as soon as the cause of them became clear to her. But my sister is abnormally passive. She is capable of feeling but not of demonstrating any great emotion: so that it is easy for anyone who does not know her to conclude that she is almost incapable of feeling emotion at all. Also she takes after my father, who was a negative, unattractive man with colourless, bony features. She has the trim, practical appearance of a cloth-bound book. In consequence she has no means of expressing by physical beauty any great depth of emotion, however beautiful it is in itself. It is beyond her to fall in love actively. Her way would be to fall in love with dismal passivity, quietly, tragically, out of sight.

There are women who would have found another quite simple way of expressing their feelings, but my sister could not even do that. She could not even cook her way to J. Eric Lawrence's heart. She was too practical for that. All our guests, unless they asked specially, ate the same food. It was against all my sister's principles to make an exception even of J. Eric Lawrence — yet one of her special smoked salmon omelets, which were delicious and which she only turned out on rare occasions, must have shown him that she had some positive, individual feeling for him. But she couldn't even do that.

No; my sister's way of showing that she was in love with J. Eric Lawrence was to go for a walk every evening. That was an old habit of hers: a walk into the town to post some letters, or as far as the common, or down to the public library to meet Miss Millay. She had always varied her route. But now it became obvious that her walk every evening was in the same direction and to the same place. She went down to J. Eric Lawrence's bridge.

It did not strike me until later how odd it was that for me the

bridge was a means of hatred, whereas for my sister it was exactly the opposite. It was odd how that inanimate and at that time almost non-existent object — there was very little to be seen except huge piles of timber, iron, and concrete lying about the meadows — should have affected our lives so much. Of course we were fools. There was I cheating myself into hating the man because I hated the bridge; and there was my sister, too inhibited and passive to express her love, going out every night, wet or fine, to gaze on a pile of raw materials lying in a field and a line of red signal lamps where the road had begun. Can you imagine anything sillier than that?

Perhaps that is what made me so angry. It all seemed so silly and irrational and pointless. It was Miss Millay who first told us about it. 'Dora always used to meet me out of the library two nights a week,' she said. 'Now she never does. I can't understand it.' I couldn't understand it either. Then gradually we found out where she was going, and I began to understand.

Without waiting to think it over, I felt terribly angry. Although I had never been directly angry with J. Eric Lawrence, I felt my antagonism suddenly shift from him towards my sister. I found all sorts of reasons for my feelings. There is nothing a woman dislikes more than to see another woman running after a man, and it seemed to me that this was what my sister was doing. Another thing, it seemed cheap; it also seemed very clumsy, and, in such a calm, rational person as my sister, very absurd and very childish. No: it did not once occur to me that perhaps she was deeply, terribly, mortally unhappy.

Then I began to notice something else. My sister began to display the strangest and most comprehensive knowledge of bridge construction. It was winter now, and sometimes J. Eric Lawrence spent the evening playing chess with Mr. Parker in the drawing-room. One evening I went into the room just in time to hear my sister say:

'Isn't the chief object of steel in reinforced concrete to resist tensile stresses?'

'Yes, that's right,' he said.

'And the concrete, I suppose, offers resistance to compression?'

'That's it,' he said, and smiled a little: the old, handsome smile with its captivating impertinence.

I was staggered to hear my sister talk like this. To me a bridge was a bridge; it had never occurred to me that there was a science of bridge-making, and when my sister began to use terms like the theory of the resolution of forces, elastic deformation, the neutral axis, and the relationship of stress to strain I saw that I was listening to a new form of love-attraction. She was trying to express her love for J. Eric Lawrence by her knowledge of something dear to him, by her brains and her ingenuity. There was something pathetic and absurd about it, and again I was strangely angry.

For a time J. Eric Lawrence was very interested in this talk of my sister's. He was very clever, naturally, very clever: he had once said that even as a boy he ate and slept and dreamed mathematics. I could well believe it. But a passion for mathematics is not inexhaustible, and a woman who elects to talk of tensile stresses has only herself to blame if after a time she becomes very boring. And gradually, that night, I saw J. Eric Lawrence becoming more and more bored by the dry, desperate, mathematical mind of my sister.

All this time I had been sitting by the fire, not saying anything. I could see his face. It was the sort of restless, sensuous, self-indulgent face that needs and is always looking for an emotionally responsive face of its own kind. A large part of the mind behind it had no interest in tensile stresses; it was bored by all thought of such things as weight of steel in superstructure. It depended for its existence on emotion, warmth, excitable beauty. I saw him look at the clock, down at his hands, at the chess-board. Yes, he was bored, bored by the talk, the game, insufferably bored above all by my sister, and I felt glad about it. Then suddenly he looked up at me. It seemed just a repetition of an habitual look, quick, attractive, rather impertinent. But now there was something else about it too. It had a kind of confidential softness in it — but I had not time to analyse it or do anything before he hurriedly got up from the chess-board.

'I knew there was something I'd forgotten,' he said. 'I knew there was something. I'd meant to see Garbo in that film at the Ritz, and to-night is the only possible night I can go. I knew there was something.'

He looked at my sister. Of course it was a weak excuse. He must have known that she never went to the cinema. She had always kept away on principle: thought it rather silly. He must have known that. Yet he said, 'How about coming too?'

'Me?' she said. 'Oh! no.' Her face began to colour deeply. 'Oh! no, no thanks, I never go. I'd rather not.'

He looked at me.

'What about you, Linda? You'll come, won't you?'

I got up. 'Yes,' I said. I spoke without thinking. 'Yes. I love Garbo.'

'Good,' he said. 'How many hours will it take you to get ready?'

'Two minutes,' I said. 'I have just to run upstairs.'

'All right, I'll get my coat,' he said.

I went upstairs and he went into the cloakroom to get his coat. After two or three minutes I came down again, and at the same moment he came out of the cloakroom.

'Ready?' he said.

'I'll just say good night to Dora,' I said. 'In case we're late.'

Opening the drawing-room door, I began to say, 'I'll just say good night, Dora, just in case——' when I saw that Mr. Parker was sitting there alone. 'Oh! where's Dora?' I said.

'I think she went out for her walk,' he said.

I did not say anything. But as I went out into the darkness with J. Eric Lawrence I felt a rush of jealousy, hatred, and triumph combine in an intolerable feeling of excitement in my heart.

At precisely that moment there began a new antagonism against my sister.

III

All that winter the building of the bridge, of course, went on; and all that winter the feeling of antagonism against my sister

deepened and got stronger. The two structures were gradually built up together.

The construction of a bridge is a slow process; similarly the building up of a certain state of emotion, like deep affection or revenge, needs time. My early feeling of hatred towards J. Eric Lawrence was superficial; I did not know him then. Yes, it was superficial, and it might have gone on being superficial if it had not been for my sister. If my sister had not fallen in love with him, I might not have acted as I did. For the plain fact is that all that winter, and on into the next spring, I set myself to fall in love with J. Eric Lawrence purposely, simply in order to spite my sister.

I have already said that my father had always shown great partiality towards my sister, and had seemed to take an unconscious or conscious revenge on me. It may be that this lay behind what I felt or did. I don't know. I only know that I took a despicable delight in doing what I did — in taking J. Eric Lawrence away from her, in appealing to the side of his nature that was foreign to her, in throwing at him all my youthful, excitable beauty and heartily rejoicing in it.

All this did not happen suddenly. It was accomplished slowly, by little things — things like visits to the movies together, glances, a dance or two, by our coming into the dark quiet house very late at night, I in a flimsy dress with bare arms, and both of us warm and excited, and once by the snow lying in light soft flakes on my sister's coat and on my gloves and my hair and he standing in the brightly lighted hall and telling me how much I looked like something off a Christmas tree, in just the flattering, sentimental way that a young girl would love, whether she admitted it or not.

Yet all that winter there was no feeling of permanence about what was happening. I had the feeling first of not giving the best part of myself, then of not trusting him. At the first opportunity I felt he would drop me and run. All the time I felt I wanted something much more secure and beautiful.

It wasn't until the next summer that anything important happened. Then one evening J. Eric Lawrence and I were walking

round the garden. For some reason or other we stopped under the lime-tree. I have already spoken about this lime-tree. It was quite large and must have been fairly old, and it overshadowed completely the west side of the house. Already that summer the grass had stopped growing underneath it, and already in the warm early June evening it was possible to breathe the almost intolerably sweet scent of the first lime-flowers.

We stood underneath the tree and then J. Eric Lawrence suddenly began to say something about the roots of such a large tree must be having a damaging effect on the foundations of the house. 'You ought to do something about it,' he said.

'What could we do?' I said.

'Well, if it were mine,' he said, 'I should have it down.'

At that moment I turned and saw my sister coming along the path from the house. That was rather her way: coming upon us suddenly, as if she couldn't leave us alone together. The evening was very clear and calm, and she must have heard what J. Eric Lawrence had said.

'So you want to cut down the lime-tree, Mr. Lawrence?' she said.

'Well, I'm only speaking from a practical point of view,' he said.

'But why?'

'It probably keeps the house damper than it should be,' he said, 'and it certainly shuts out light and air. And I should think it adversely affects the foundations.'

Well, that was practical enough — just the sort of practical, sober reasoning that ought normally to have appealed to my sister. But she wouldn't have it. She suddenly showed that she had an enormous sentimental attachment to that tree. She flushed hotly and said:

'You may want it down, but I don't. I don't, and I never shall!'

'I think Mr. Lawrence is right,' I said.

I spoke quickly. The reaction was instinctive. If I had thought a moment I should have realized how much I myself loved that tree, which with its first long olive-green leaves, the honey-fragrant blossoms, and the masses of claret-coloured branches in winter was

the most beautiful thing in our overgrown, neglected garden. Yes, it was a beautiful thing, but suddenly I wanted it down. I wanted to be against my sister; I wanted to show her that J. Eric Lawrence and I were on one side and she on another. I wanted to be able to revel in an aggravated sense of triumphant superiority.

'After all,' I said, 'the tree is no good to us.'

'All the same, I love it and I'd rather die,' she said, 'than have it down.'

'Well, there's no need to come over all sentimental about it.'

'Perhaps I am sentimental,' she said.

'Perhaps!' I said. 'Just hark at her,' I said to J. Eric Lawrence. 'She must think we're a pretty hard-bitten pair.'

'I don't think anything,' she said. 'I'm only saying what I feel.'

'All right,' I said, 'you're not obliged to cry over it.'

That was a bitter thing to say and she did not answer it. Instead she turned and walked back into the house. In that moment, as I now see it, a break was made between us: she on one side, J. Eric Lawrence and I on the other. When she had gone it seemed suddenly very silent. It was growing dark and the leaves of the lime-tree were wonderfully still. By the trunk of the tree there was an old iron seat and we sat down on it. For some time we sat without saying anything. There are evenings in summer when it never grows cool and the nectar keeps rising in all the flowers in the warm darkness, until the darkness itself is inexpressibly deep with scent. You feel it would be good to sit there all night long, and it was like that as we sat there under the lime-tree. My mind, young and excitable and at its best deeply sensitive, suddenly took a new direction. I felt very moved by the evening, the silence, the strange atmosphere of protectiveness given out by the lime-tree spreading itself above me.

We sat there for a long time. The lights in the house began to go out, and when the last one had completed the darkness J. Eric Lawrence turned to me and asked whose it was and I said it was my sister's.

'Is your room on the other side?' he said.

'Yes,' I said. I had made up my mind what I wanted now

'You know it's just at the top of the new staircase,' I said, 'where it comes up from the kitchen.'

I V

He began to come to my room very often that summer and autumn, using the second staircase, until the bridge was finished. I don't know if my sister knew about it. She may have done; she may not. She knew that he was in the habit of working very late at night, at correspondence and plans and such things, and it is possible that she never suspected.

The odd thing is that I was not afraid of her knowing. On the contrary I was afraid of her not knowing. I wanted her to know. I wanted to confront her with the whole thing, to show her that what I felt for J. Eric Lawrence was something more real and more exciting and splendid than anything she could feel on that solitary nightly walk of hers down to the bridge. How often she walked down to that bridge I don't know. I cannot begin to think what she felt for it, unless it was that in her level-headed, practical way she could never let herself fall in love with a person directly, but only with something symbolic of that person, like J. Eric Lawrence's bridge. I only know that she was in love with him, very deeply, very passively, at a distance, a sort of love by remote control, and I only knew that later.

Then, in October that year, my sister had a great shock. She could not have been more greatly shocked if she had walked into my room one night and found J. Eric Lawrence there.

One morning, when she took J. Eric Lawrence's coffee and eggs into the dining-room, she found Mr. Parker and Miss Millay shaking him enthusiastically by the hand.

'Why,' she said, 'is it a birthday or something?'

'No,' Miss Millay said, very excited, 'it's better than that. Better than that. It's the bridge. The bridge.'

'The bridge?' my sister said.

'Yes!' Miss Millay said. 'It's to be opened on November the fifteenth.'

'The fifteenth?' my sister said. 'But that's only three weeks away.'

'Nevertheless,' Mr. Parker said, 'that's the date.'

My sister looked at J. Eric Lawrence. 'But it was to take eighteen months,' she said. 'It's hardly been fifteen.'

'We had special orders from the Ministry some weeks ago to get a move on,' he said. 'We're anxious to get the new road open before there's any chance of flooding on the old one. I'm told it floods very easily down there.'

'Then it means you'll soon be going?' my sister said.

'Yes, soon be going now,' he said.

It was Miss Millay who told me how my sister reacted to that simple and, as it seemed, purposely abrupt statement. She went deathly white. There are women who would have rushed out of the room, made a demonstration. But there was only one demonstration my sister could make. It was the simple demonstration that she was terribly sick at heart.

I do not suppose J. Eric Lawrence noticed anything. That would be like him. Nor was I upset by the news that the bridge would soon be finished and that by the beginning of December J. Eric Lawrence would have gone away. My reason for not being upset was quite simple. I was determined that if he went away I should go with him.

That night I made him promise that. For him, as I see it now, it must have been a very simple thing to promise. I was very young, very excitable, and in a dangerously credulous state of mind. In the darkness of the bedroom I could not of course see his face. All I wanted was a simple answer. All he had to say was 'Yes, you can come with me,' and that, of course, is exactly what he did say.

It was the next day when I realized that there was just one thing more that I wanted.

'If we're going away we ought to tell Dora,' I said.

'Must we? It's four or five weeks yet.'

'We ought to tell her,' I said. 'I want to tell her.'

'Now?'

'As soon as possible.'

'Look,' he said. He smiled at me in the old, completely captivating way. 'Let's wait until the bridge is finished. Won't that do?'

'All right,' I said.

So we waited until the bridge was finished; and until the day the bridge was opened I went about with what must have been an impossibly conceited air of only partially disguised triumph. But it was nothing to the triumph that I saw on my sister's face when she stood with the privileged spectators on the bridge that soft clear November afternoon, with the dead leaves of the neighbouring willow-trees blowing idly along the new white concrete, over the new stone parapets, and falling lightly on to the grass, on the railway track, and on the clear water of the river below. There were many people there, and they cheered loudly as the Minister of Transport, accompanied by a large group of important townsmen, cut the tape and made the usual joke about paying for the scissors and then shook hands with J. Eric Lawrence. The triumph on my sister's face was at that moment complete. It was wonderfully characteristic: passive, but deep; quite strong, but beautifully unselfish and secure. The most wonderful thing about it was that it lacked all direction; it was not a triumph against anyone. Only my sister can tell what she felt, of course, high up on that shining white bridge in the clear golden November air, but it seemed to me as if she might have regarded the bridge as her own spiritual triumph.

As soon as the bridge was opened the traffic began to drive over it, and shortly afterwards the Minister of Transport and the officials drove back to London, and then my sister, J. Eric Lawrence, and I drove slowly home through the town. It had been a tense day for all of us and we did not speak much. My sister was too shy and too passive even to congratulate J. Eric Lawrence on his achievement, but all the time I knew she was still nursing that deep, private sense of triumph.

I too was nursing something, and I knew that I could not keep it much longer. My sister had had her triumph. Now it was my

turn. And that evening, just before Miss Millay and Mr. Parker came down to supper, and when there were only the three of us in the sitting-room, my sister smiled at J. Eric Lawrence and said she supposed it was only a question of time now before he packed his bags?

‘You mean our bags,’ I said.

My sister did not speak. Her mouth was open a little, and I remember thinking how foolish, unreliable, and vacantly frightened she looked.

‘You must have known,’ I said, looking straight at her. I had waited so long for that particular moment that now there seemed nothing in it. The tragic surprised vacancy in my sister’s face made everything else seem sterile.

‘You must have known,’ I said. ‘Now the bridge is finished we’re going away together.’

My sister did not speak. Her face was now very white. I had no more to say either. A fortnight later J. Eric Lawrence left for London. I was to follow him four days later and meet him at the Park Hotel.

v

It is now summer again and I am back in Parkinford. The summer has been a good one and, contrary to all our early fears, the bridge and the by-pass have made no difference to business with us. We have been very busy all summer and by evening, by eight or nine o’clock, after supper is over, we are both tired out. My sister does not go for her walk now, and I do not go out either. I have got into the habit of sitting in what used to be my father’s study. It used to be a very dark, gloomy little room but it is very light now. The reason for this is that my sister has had all the branches of the lime-tree cut off, leaving the trunk stark and bare, so that now there is nothing to shut out the light.

But this is not what I am trying to say, and perhaps it would be better if I came to the point. I have never been a very practical person, and the truth is that there are things about J. Eric Lawrence that I should have found out but which, because I was young

and romantic and excitable, I did not trouble about. But then my sister, who is so extremely practical and far-sighted and realistic, did not trouble about them either. Of course we were fools, and it did not occur to either of us that J. Eric Lawrence was a married man who had for some years not lived with his wife. Even now my sister does not know that. She does not know that I went to the Park Hotel and found a letter telling me, in the most charming and persuasive terms of course, that simple and final fact, without giving an address to which I could send an answer. No, she does not know that, and if there is any question of triumph now it lies with her. She knows that my love-affair with J. Eric Lawrence is over. She knows that he will never come back, of course, but there must always be for her the secret and perhaps exciting hope that one day he might drop in for tea, stay on to supper, and talk once again of bridges and tensile stresses and smile at us in the old charming, self-indulgent, impertinent way and proceed to captivate us all completely.

Of course he won't come. I know that. We were both fools. The strange thing is that I do not hold him responsible. I am responsible. If it had not been for that recurrent and inexplicable feeling of antagonism towards my sister it would never have happened. My sister would have fallen in love with him in her own way, with unspoken passivity, and when he went away she would have locked it all away very nicely in her heart. For a time she would have brooded over it, squeezed from it a few drops of miserable, solitary pleasure, and then probably after a time have got over it.

The point is that it is not all over. J. Eric Lawrence has gone, the bridge has long since become an unnoticed part of our everyday life, the beauty and excitement and trouble of last summer are things of the past, but the antagonism remains.

It is, however, not only that. There is still something else. It might be possible to do something about the antagonism itself, but now something else has happened in this house where for so many years nothing ever happened at all.

We have another permanent guest. He is a youngish man named

Barnes, and he has just been transferred to one of the banks here. He is a very pleasant, courteous, fair-haired man who could not cherish a moment's antagonism against a soul. He is gentle without being at all docile. He rushes to open doors for us, and moves with discretion when he comes in late at night from the bank. He plays the piano rather well, and you get the impression when he plays that the hammers are muffled with wool. There is nothing impertinent or passionate or vain about him, he could never build a bridge over a river, but it seems to me that he is the sort of person in whom you could confide an enormous amount of trouble. He listens with the gravest attention to all you say, and it is obvious he would not hurt a soul. He is like a well-made cushion on which you could rest your head.

And that is exactly how I feel. After the bitterness and shock and tumultuous emotion of the affair with J. Eric Lawrence I feel that I should like to rest. I should like to rest for a long time. I should like to find someone in whom I could confide and who will never think of hurting me—someone who will be decent to me for the rest of my life.

It is the simplest, most natural desire in the world, and yet I am immensely frightened of it. And I am frightened of it because my sister has begun to think exactly as I do. She is also thinking of Mr. Barnes. There is something in her quiet, passive nature which would appeal enormously to a man like him, and it is easy to see that in a very prosaic, very inglorious sort of way he could fall in love with her.

I am at the moment sitting in my father's former study, looking out of the window. In my absence last winter, as I said, my sister lopped the branches of the lime-tree. A few fresh twigs, now a deep claret colour, have shot out from the trunk, but there are no flowers this year and what was once a large, dark, graceful tree now looks hateful. You would not believe what a difference it makes. You see things you could never see before, and there is light everywhere.

Downstairs in the drawing-room Mr. Barnes is very softly playing the piano. I have been listening to him, but I cannot tell

exactly what it is he is playing. It is something very soothing and subdued, in a minor key, and I have no doubt that somewhere in the house my sister is listening too.

It is almost dark and I have been looking and listening for a long time. The bridge has been built. I have been away and have come back again. My sister has lopped the branches of the lime-tree and now in the house there is the sound of this gentle Mr. Barnes playing the piano. Things have changed, and yet in a way they have remained the same. For God's sake, what is going to happen now?

His Fortieth Birthday

BY T. O. BEACHCROFT

(From *Story*)

DAVID RETFORD stood by his bedroom window in the doubtful sunshine of an early June morning. It was about seven o'clock. It looked as if it was going to be a cool grey day, neither wet nor fine.

He strolled over to his wife's bedside and smiled down at her. His blue eyes looked out of a face that was ageing yet still rather boyish. His fair hair was now going a little grey — so was his neat moustache. He was slightly built — rather too slightly built; with a little more bulk and height he might have been handsome.

'Don't forget,' he said to Isabel, who put her hands behind her head and looked up at him from the pillow, 'we're going down to Bill's school to-day. There are the sports, and then he's got into the final of this reading prize.'

'I know,' said Isabel. She sat up, swung her legs out of bed, stretched out her arms, and yawned. 'I'm quite excited about it. I do hope he wins it. I wish he could.'

'Perhaps he will.'

'My trouble,' she said, throwing back her hair, 'is the usual trouble. What am I going to wear? Tell me.'

'Oh, I don't know,' said David. 'I leave it to you. You know I shall think you look nice, whatever you wear.'

She frowned. 'David, do try and take a little interest. If you took any real interest in me, you'd take the trouble to help me. Oh, all right, I know I'm simply boring you.'

'Of course you aren't boring me, sweetheart. And of course I take an interest in you.'

'Well, what am I to wear? I know you can't take any real interest. I always look frightful nowadays. I'm an old hag. How can I look nice?'

'But you do look nice.'

Isabel was now out of bed. She stood in front of the mirror in a crumpled nightgown, looking at her face and frowning. She, also, was fair and of slight build; and she, also, had not altered very greatly since her early twenties. However, her hair, which had been blonde, or rather sandy, was now freely speckled with grey. Now it stood out untidily round her head. She had never been beautiful; but she had a wide mouth that was appealing, and a pair of grey eyes that told of quick and eager emotions and made her whole face full of expression.

David stood behind his wife and smiled over her shoulder into the mirror.

'To *me* you look nice, darling,' he said.

'Oh, David, don't!' she said. 'You just irritate me. I look awful. Look at this hateful, hateful wrinkle. I hate it. I loathe it. Go away, you beast. Oh, if only I had more money to look after myself. Look at my hair. It looks just like straw. I look an old hag. All the other parents at Bill's school will be so smart. Poor Bill, how awful his mother will look.'

'Now, sweetheart,' said David, putting his hands round her shoulders. 'You're just working yourself up. Don't get fussed. There's one thing which is perfectly certain, and it's this — we're going to see nobody but the parents of preparatory-school boys and they'll all be our own age.'

'How awful! What a show of old hags!'

'Now, cheer up. Don't be naughty. The sun's almost shining. And it's my birthday.'

'David!' said Isabel in a totally different and rather breathless voice, turning round and looking at him. 'Your birthday. And I've never kissed you or said "happy returns" or anything. Let me take a good look at you now you're forty.'

She kissed him suddenly on the lips and strained him to her and said: 'You're the best husband any woman ever had, anywhere, at any time. I mean that. And now I'll give you my silly present.'

She gave him the present. It was a leather collar box. The idea was to keep his stiff collars tidy in a corner of the sock drawer;

there was never room to keep his things properly in separate places, and they were always being muddled up together.

'The present is splendid,' said David. 'Uncle Mark always used to have a collar box. It was green shagreen with his initials on. I always thought that to have a collar box was the last word in grown-up opulence. Now I've got one.'

As he spoke, his mind went back to another June morning — exactly thirty years before — his tenth birthday morning. Uncle Mark was standing in a brocaded red silk dressing-gown shaving by an open window. There was a brilliant blue sky outside; the window was framed with creeper, and the scent of June roses and the air of a country garden came in. On the floor against one wall was a row of perfectly polished shoes, boots, and hunting tops.

Uncle Mark talked about dogs and fishing and horses, treating him as if he were almost grown up already.

'We'll soon be making a man of you now, David, old boy,' said Uncle Mark. 'You're in your double figures now.'

By God, that was thirty years ago. Thirty years since that small boy, who was somehow still David, had heard those words, and breathed that gorgeous air and stared at that row of polished boots. He smiled to himself and went to shave in his own bathroom, drawing hot water from the geyser, and dodging from side to side as Isabel came by to sponge her face and hands at the cold tap. The imagery of many years long past ran on and on in his mind.

At the breakfast table Isabel broke into his silence. 'You still haven't told me what to wear.'

'Well,' said David, 'what's wrong with your black coat and skirt?'

'It needs a silver fox to make it look anything.'

'Not in summer.'

'I'm sure it wouldn't be dressy enough. Everybody'll be in summer frocks and things.'

'You can't go wrong with that coat and skirt,' said David. 'That was the whole point of getting such an expensive one, wasn't it?'

Isabel shook her head and sighed.

'No,' she said. 'The coat and skirt are five years old. The skirt's been let down twice and taken up once.'

'Well, wear that new blue silk summer frock.'

'I don't like it a bit. It's cheap.'

'Well, I'm sure it'll be all right. It isn't such a fearfully smart affair, after all.'

Isabel pouted gloomily, and sighed. 'It's so easy for a man. That's what's always so unfair.'

David smiled and stood up.

'I'm afraid it's getting late,' he said. 'I must be running along to the office.'

'What?' she said. 'To-day? It's Saturday, and your birthday — surely you needn't go to-day?'

'I'm sorry,' said David. 'I really must go. There are one or two things that I've just got to see to.'

'Can't they wait till Monday?'

'No, they must go to-day — otherwise the customers will think they aren't getting attention.'

Isabel looked still more discontented and began arranging the salt cellar and teaspoons mechanically in a row.

'David,' she said, 'I'm sure you're much too conscientious in your job. Why should you always be slaving for that beastly firm — and for such a miserable salary? They ought to pay you at least fifteen hundred pounds a year. They're simply robbing you. Why don't you *make* them pay you more?'

'They think my six hundred pounds is pretty lavish,' he said. 'Besides, the job really doesn't run to more. The money simply isn't there to pay me more. I don't earn it.'

'I'm sure you do really,' said Isabel. 'You bet all the directors are taking three or four thousand. It is hopeless trying to get through on six hundred. If it wasn't for my extra two hundred and fifty pounds we simply couldn't do it. And that just gets swallowed up. Everything is getting so fearfully shabby. Do you know, we haven't bought anything new for our home for years.'

'What about those sitting-room curtains?'

'I don't count those. They're only cheap common little cre-

tonnes, just suburban. And do you know *all* the carpets are wearing out? What are we going to do about them?’

‘My pants are hanging round me in festoons, if it comes to that,’ said David, laughing.

‘I’ve mended them a million times.’

‘Now, look here,’ said David. ‘Stop grumbling and cheer up. I’ve got a piece of news. It might be good news. I’ve been keeping it absolutely under my own hat, as it’s all been so vague.’

Isabel at once leaned forward eagerly, her eyes shining.

‘Go on,’ she said. ‘What is it? Tell me all about it?’

‘Well, there’s a new job, all quite in the offing at present. It’s some new business-research bureau which is going to be run with a government grant — under the wing of the Home Office.’

‘Why, David, it’s just made for you. Are you going to be head of it? How much is it?’

‘Well, there’s a job at nine hundred pounds — and for once I’ve got a little personal pull. Old Lord Trevethick has got his finger on it, and you know he’s always been a good friend to me. He knew Uncle Mark very well. He thinks he can work it for me.’

‘David,’ said Isabel enthusiastically, ‘it’s lovely. Of course you’ll get it and you’ll get out of that beastly business job which you’ve always loathed. You oughtn’t to be in business at all, David.’

‘Now, darling,’ said David. ‘Please — please don’t get excited about it. You know what my luck’s like.’

‘But this time, David, you’re going to be lucky. You know how psychic I am.’

David laughed and kissed her on the forehead and left for his office.

The office was quiet and not unpleasant on Saturday mornings. There was pale sunshine coming in, which made the old piece of carpet in his room look almost bright. He opened his post and dictated half a dozen letters. Then he was able to give some careful thought to a sheet of sales statistics and to make notes for a report he was going to write. All this was peaceful and in a way reassuring. He was doing his job. There were no telephone interrup-

tions, no awful mistakes to look into, no sudden summonses from his chief.

After an hour's quiet work he heard the clocks striking eleven; he sat back in his chair and the office-boy came in with a personal letter that had just come in by the mid-morning post. He saw on it the crest of a senior West End club — and he knew before he opened it, that the letter came from Lord Trevethick. He felt a pulse beating in his throat. He opened it and read:

'My dear Retford,

'I am sorry to give you disappointing news about the proposed new Research Bureau, but I have just heard that a man already in the Home Office has asked if he can apply.

'He is a man with a distinguished record, well known to all the committee, and he is seeking a change of experience. Under the circumstances, I think he's bound to be appointed.

'Till this happened I had high hopes of your candidature. . . .'

David folded the letter up very slowly and carefully and put it in his pocket. One took this sort of thing very calmly at forty, he told himself. There'd be other chances for other jobs yet. After all, he was only forty. Yet it was a nice little smack in the face for a birthday present. Damnation — why had he told Isabel?

At this moment the door opened and two younger men came in. One was Schofield. Schofield was the boss's nephew, and he was supposed to be learning the business. He was a big, handsome fellow of about twenty-five or six. He had dark hair which was very sleekly oiled and brushed, and at the moment he was very smartly dressed for an afternoon in the country.

The other young man, Peters, was doing a five-pound-a-week job as a clerk. This morning they had come in simply to talk, and soon they were sitting on David's desk and arguing about communism and capitalism. Peters was strongly left wing and became very heated. Schofield poured suave and amused scorn on communists, capitalists, socialists, dictators, and bourgeois alike.

'Of course,' David heard him saying, 'old Retford here is an interesting case, and very typical. He is one of the old-fashioned

bourgeois who are just getting squeezed out. His sort have owed their position and way of life to large private incomes for generations. When they have to face the world with nothing but their own abilities very few of them can really stand the pace. Retford here has a son at an expensive prep school; he knows country people in country houses; and other people in town houses. But if only he'd make up his mind to go and live in the suburbs and do the suburban things and let his little boy talk with an accent, he'd be much happier. Wouldn't you, Retford?

David laughed. He was giving the conversation just enough surface attention to be dimly aware of what was being said. Schofield was wonderfully self-assured.

'The real trouble with the whole of that class,' said Peters dogmatically, 'is that they won't fight. So many of them have the right point of view intellectually. But will they risk one atom of their social position to fight for what they really know to be right and true? They simply won't fight. Why is it, Retford?'

'Oh, I don't know,' said Retford. 'I've fought a bit in my time, you know, Peters. I fought in a war once. That's how I got this arm of mine all messed up.'

'Yes,' said Peters. 'But then you were just doing what you were told. *That's* not what I mean by fighting.'

For a few minutes David lost the sense of their remarks completely. He heard the sound of their voices but he did not know what they were saying. There was a time, after he first came back from the front, when he used to see mutilated corpses in khaki lying on the pavements of London. They were so real and horrible he used to try and step over them, and hide his eyes from them.

The others went on talking. Presently a clock struck twelve and David stood up to go.

'Come and have a beer,' said Schofield.

'Yes, come on,' said Peters.

'No, thanks,' said David. 'I must get along.' He went off to the tube station.

'Do you think he was offended?' said Schofield over the beer.

'Can't be helped,' said Peters. 'People have to face facts.'

At about half-past three David parked his car, among the cars of the other parents, in a field near to Bill's school. The field had been set aside especially for the purpose, and an attendant in a white coat and peaked cap gave them a ticket.

This was a touch of lavishness that was typical of Borland's School. There was a feeling of lavishness about the whole place. The main building was a large nineteenth-century house with a long, irregular red-bricked and gabled front, built more or less in the Jacobean style. To this had been added the school's own small chapel, swimming pool, gymnasium, and speech hall. The speech hall would be in use later on in the afternoon, for the reading prize.

The buildings stood on a wooded hillside which sloped down to a small valley — a flat stretch of meadowland enclosed by woods all round. Here the playing fields had been made. Borland had taken over the school from his father — and succeeded in thirty years in turning it from an ordinary preparatory school into one that was famous. He was a tall and rugged man with a mop of white hair and a loud voice. He was less like a schoolmaster than an old political warhorse, whom time had mellowed into geniality.

Everybody agreed that there was a touch of genius about Mr. Borland. David and Isabel had been thankful, after much searching, to find a school for Bill that seemed fairly free and easy, where they felt Bill would be happy. Yet it was not in any way open to the charge of being a crank school.

This middle course was Borland's particular skill. He appealed to parents with progressive ideas about education, but he appealed also to parents who would sooner have sacrificed their children to Moloch than have done anything unconventional. The only thing wrong with the school from the point of view of David and Isabel was that they had never realized quite how expensive it was going to be till Bill was well settled into it.

They left the car, and as they strolled down the hill and entered the crowded playing field they felt slightly as if they were walking into a native village which they had found in the middle of a jungle.

As soon as they entered the arena, David realized that Isabel would regret that she had not put on her coat and skirt. The sky

was still grey and overcast. The crowd was tweed-clad, and everyone's clothes were most expensively unobtrusive. Isabel in her light-coloured coat and flowered frock was not quite right.

In the midst of the crowd they found Mr. Borland and shook him by the hand. He greeted them a little vaguely and was caught up at once by some other parents. A few minutes later Bill had seen them. He was fair, blue-eyed, and slight, like his father. He was now in his last year at Borland's.

'Hullo,' said Bill.

'Hullo, Bill,' they answered. They felt strangers to each other in the school surroundings.

'The sports will be over fairly soon,' said Bill. 'I'm an awful ass not to have got into any of the finals. I'm no good at sprints at all, but I *almost* got into the final of the half-mile.'

'Bad luck,' said David. 'Still you had a good try.'

They walked toward the track that had been marked out on the grass with white pegs. Chairs were drawn up beside the finishing straight.

'The half-mile will be starting in a few minutes,' said Bill. 'Let's watch it.'

They sat down, the parents on chairs, Bill on the grass beside them.

'Why don't you sit on a chair?' said Isabel. 'There are plenty about.'

'No, I won't, thanks,' said Bill. 'People would see me.' David nodded and understood.

'But there's no rule against it, is there?' said Isabel.

'Of course not, Mother.'

'Well, you needn't worry so much what other people are going to think. Besides, the grass may be wet.'

'Dry as a chip, Mum,' said Bill. 'I'd sooner stop here.'

'Tell us about this reading prize that's coming after tea,' said David. 'Do you think you'll win it?'

'Shouldn't think so,' said Bill. 'It's rather silly, really.'

'But you've got into the final of that,' said his mother. 'That's good, isn't it?'

'Oh, I dunno,' said Bill, and tearing up a piece of grass he began to chew it, and turned away from his parents.

'Ch, *Bill*,' said Isabel, 'don't be such a little oyster. Dad and I want to hear about it. We really do.'

Bill, making an effort, answered them, but kept the blade of grass between his teeth as he talked.

'Oh, well,' he said, 'it's like this. There's a boy here called Raymond Martin. Old Borland is a friend of his grandfather, Sir Philip Martin, and he's supposed to be a great Shakespearian actor or something. Anyhow, Sir Philip Martin's put up this prize for reading aloud. I just thought I'd go in. We had a sort of tryout two days ago, and they picked me and two other chaps to do it in public to-day, worse luck.'

'But Bill,' said Isabel, 'how lovely. And how good of you to have been picked. Do you feel nervous?'

'Why should I feel nervous?' said Bill, between clenched teeth. 'I'm not going to be hurt.' He scowled at the grass.

'That's the right idea, old boy,' said David. 'Just do your best, and hope for the best.'

'I expect you'll win,' said Isabel.

'No,' said Bill. 'Horsley is bound to win.'

'Who is Horsley?'

'Don't be silly, Mum. You know Horsley. He's captain of cricket — he won the quarter-mile yesterday and you'll see him win the half in a few minutes. He's jolly good at everything.'

At this moment a young master came along and said cheerfully: 'Hullo, Bill. I've been looking for you all over the shop. Would you like to run in the final of the half-mile?'

Bill began to get on his feet but stopped on his knees and said, 'Has anyone fallen out, then?'

'Yes, Turner's twisted his ankle in the high jump.'

'Not much use, is it?' said Bill.

'Yes, run, of course,' said the young man. 'Always go for things if you get the chance. Come along, I'm collecting the runners now.'

Bill got up. David could see a pulse beating in his neck. He knew just the curious weak feeling which Bill had suddenly begun

to feel in his stomach. Bill turned round, made a grimace at his parents, and dashed off. Presently they saw the eight runners lined up at the start. All the boys wore white singlets and shorts and had bare legs. David watched Bill standing ready at one end of the line, while at the other was Horsley. Horsley was a brown-skinned boy with dark curly hair and an attractive smile. They all stood silent with intent, serious faces. Then the pistol banged and they were off.

It was two laps of the grass track, and as half a mile is a long race for boys under fourteen, they went round at a slow pace. Bill seemed to be running quite easily with the others.

Now they went away from the crown over to the far side of the ground. David filled his lungs with a deep breath as he watched them running. The scene became suddenly a jewel-like cameo — held, as it seemed, minute and far away in the dark brilliance of a lens. There was the wide stretch of green grass with the trees beyond, under the cool grey summer sky, and poised at a corner were the white-clothed runners. As David watched, he seemed to see a glimpse of the whole course and purpose of these boys' lives; and his vision seemed to take Bill and these other boys out of boyhood, to a time when they would be young men struggling with the problems of life; and then men with wives and children of their own. And for a moment David hardly knew whether all his life, since the time when he had been at school himself, had not been a dream.

Then the boys came around again to the seats. He heard again the sound of their running feet, the murmur of the talking voices all around him. He let out his breath in a long sigh. Isabel whispered, 'Perhaps Bill will win after all.'

But as she said it, Horsley moved up to the front and began to increase his pace. Soon the boys were tailing out, all struggling, and all losing ground to Horsley. Then Horsley came around into the finishing straight and broke the tape, running strongly and easily. The others struggled home, and Bill, desperately winded, finished last but one.

The parents clapped, the boys shouted, and then there was a

general move toward the tea tent. Bill went off to change his clothes. And after tea everyone strolled up to the school buildings and took their seats in the speech room, the parents in front and the boys behind. It was a small hall, panelled in new oak, which held the whole school of about eighty boys and a hundred or more visitors. Mr. Borland, Sir Philip Martin, and the three boys who were competing in the reading prize took their places on the platform.

Mr. Borland made an introductory speech. All the time David felt a mounting tension and nervousness, and wondered how Bill was feeling up on the platform. The three boys, who were now clothed in grey flannel suits, looked very solemn.

Bill had to read second and Horsley last; the other boy led off. Three pieces had been chosen by Sir Philip, and each boy had to read the same three pieces, in the same order. It was explained that they had been given no coaching or advice of any kind. The pieces were varied, and David thought well chosen for boys' voices.

The first passage came from the Elizabethan poet Ford, and it described a musical duel between a boy flute player and a nightingale. There followed the story of David and Goliath from the Bible beginning with the words 'And Saul armed David with his armour and put a helmet of brass upon his head'. Lastly came a breezy naval scene from Captain Marryat.

The first boy who read was rather wooden. He read well, but without any particular interest. Now came Bill's turn. He walked to the front of the platform, announced his passage, as the boys had been asked to do. His voice was slightly husky and he evidently felt very nervous.

However, as soon as he began to read his nervousness seemed to go and David saw, with a thrill of pleasure, a Bill whom he had never known before.

His voice was clear and musical. He soon put down the book and repeated Ford's lines by heart, fixing his eyes on the back of the room as if he could see there the images he was describing. There was nothing showy, no attempt at acting, yet he lost himself completely in what he was doing; and his voice and spontaneous feeling

for the poetry quickened an emotion in the lines that went far beyond their surface quaintness — an emotion that the poet had felt himself perhaps in writing these words, and that the boy now brought to life again.

‘a nightingale,’ [Bill was saying now],
‘Nature’s best skill’d musician, undertakes
The challenge, and for ev’ry several strain
The well-shap’d youth could touch, she sung her down;
He could not run division with more art
Upon his quaking instrument, than she,
The nightingale, did with her various notes
Reply to.’

When Bill had finished the whole passage there was a silence; then there was no clapping, but a murmur of appreciation and pleasure among the parents. Isabel caught David’s hand and gave it a squeeze. He heard a white-haired lady next saying, ‘Charming, charming — that boy’s an artist.’

Bill went on with David and Goliath; and then the scene from Marryat, both of which David thought he did well. At the end he received a generous burst of applause.

Then it was Horsley’s turn. He came to the front of the platform, and began the nightingale passage with perfect self-confidence. He read the verse well, but, David felt, without any of that unexpected inner emotion that Bill had found in the lines. David and Goliath, and the Marryat passage, he felt, were overdone by Horsley. The boy was clever and perfectly himself, but David thought he was a little cheap. He too received plenty of applause, especially from the other boys.

Now the elderly Sir Philip Martin got up to announce his verdict. It was some years since he had retired from acting. He was silver-haired and slightly senile. No sooner had he begun his speech than David had an uneasy feeling that he meant to award the prize to Horsley. He listened to Sir Philip’s words, gritting his teeth and with a sinking heart.

‘Now all three did very well,’ said Sir Philip in his ageing voice,

'but the first boy, and I'm sure he will not mind my saying so, was a little lifeless and wooden. The second boy,' — he glanced down at his notes — 'the second boy, Retford his name is, read very nicely. I should like to congratulate you, Retford, on the very clear, smooth way in which you read, or rather recited, the lines from Ford. But again I thought in the two other passages there was a little lack of feeling in Retford. He did not seem to find the stories very exciting. Supposing it was one of you boys who had killed Goliath, he would hardly have told us about it so calmly. I think he had not ever really seen that David was just a real boy — a little older than some of you.

'Therefore I think you will all agree with me that the prize ought to go to Horsley. He not only read well, but he read with feeling. He read as if these things really mattered to him. He read with eagerness, in fact with something of the very same spirit that helped him to win that half-mile, so splendidly, earlier this afternoon.'

At these words David groaned inwardly, and while everybody was clapping a cold leaden weight descended on his heart.

'What a hopeless old idiotic fool,' Isabel whispered to him. 'He's so old he's gone childish.' And as they went out of the hall David heard the white-haired lady saying: 'Well, I don't really agree with Sir Philip. I myself should have given the prize to that second boy.'

When they were outside Isabel went to find Bill, but David went to speak to Borland, the headmaster. After standing in the crowd for some minutes, he managed to isolate him.

'Well,' said David to Borland, 'I'm sorry Bill didn't pull off the prize. Bad luck, wasn't it?'

'Yes — yes,' said Borland. 'Still, he did very well, I thought. He read very nicely indeed. And he did quite well to run in the final of that race too.'

David nodded. Mr. Borland was slightly preoccupied in smiling and nodding to the other parents. 'Good-bye,' he kept saying. 'I hope you've enjoyed it.'

'About Bill —' said David. 'Don't you think it would be

rather good for him to *win* sometimes? I mean, he's always doing fairly well, coming in second and so on. I sometimes feel if he could once win it might start him being much more successful.'

'Possibly,' said Borland. 'But still I shouldn't worry about that, Mr. Retford. There's heaps of room in this world for people like Bill, isn't there? He's a bit quiet, but he's always trying. He's always trying hard. The world doesn't need brilliant people only.'

'I suppose not,' said David. 'And how about his school work? Any use his trying for a scholarship?'

'Well, there's no harm in trying,' said Mr. Borland. 'But —'

At this moment Horsley's mother and father came up, and with them old Sir Philip Martin. Borland turned to them, greeting Mr. and Mrs. Horsley heartily. Mrs. Horsley had on an immaculate black coat and skirt edged with braid. She wore a double silver fox fur. Horsley's father was six foot two and broad. He had a handsome florid face, and he wore a red carnation in his buttonhole.

They began talking to Borland in loud, cheerful voices.

'Well,' said Mr. Horsley, 'the kid hasn't done so badly to-day, has he? I must say, this reading business is a new one on me. He told me he only went in for it on the spur of the moment — partly as a joke — just to see if he could do it.'

Horsley's father laughed. David hung about for a minute or two, thinking Borland would introduce him as the father of the boy who had been second in the reading prize. But Borland was quite taken up with the Horsleys and Sir Philip. After a while it seemed undignified to wait any longer, so David went to find his family and to say good-bye to Bill, and to try and cheer him up about the reading prize.

Oh, hell! he thought. To hell with that thrice-damned and doddering old fool of an actor. Why should he have done this to Bill? Why should he have given the prize to something that was showy and second best? 'Bad luck, Bill,' he would have to say. 'You did jolly well, old man — just keep on trying. That's the idea: keep on trying. That's the thing that really matters in this life — keep on trying. It doesn't really matter about the prizes. Just keep on trying.'

Sympathy

BY FRANCES BELLERBY

(From *The Listener*)

IN the damp spring evening the three boys walked slowly away from the old woman's lonely cottage, two of them carefully carrying the frail between them, the smallest walking behind with eyes fixed on the bulging frail. The old woman hobbled down the path after them, and when they had passed through the garden gate and were making their way along the field-track to the road, she remained at the gate, clinging with monkey-like hands to the wooden spikes, and screamed anxiously: 'Now mind as ye do do as I tell'd yer, mind as ye do do it pra'aper! Lift en out careful, mind, as stone don't bash poor crittur to's death afore en's drowned! Do it pra'aper, there's good kind chillun, an' bring bag back to me in t' marnin', an' sixpence atween ye ull be yer award.' The boys could not help hearing her, but they gave no sign. They were far too excited. And she was only repeating herself; all had been settled before they had left the cottage with their burden.

Once out of sight of the humped and ragged old cottage, the boys began to run. It was not that they themselves intended this, but simply their legs forgot how to walk. Faster and faster went their six legs, until they were running like anything down the steepening slope of the gravelly little road which led to the village and the shallow river. But because they had promised to go very carefully, the two with the frail held their arms stiffly and shouted at each other to mind and keep it still. The smallest boy pounded along behind, churning up the gravel in tremendous excitement, his eyes never leaving the bulging, swinging frail.

Presently the road dived between high, wet, grassy banks, and passed under a railway arch. The boys clattered through this archway, and then Davy, the biggest, swung suddenly aside, pulling

Joseph with him by the frail; and scrabbling in his clumsy boots over the ditch, he flung himself down on the wet celandine-starred bank.

'Let's have a look at 'en!' he shouted shrilly.

Joseph floundered after him and bent, panting, to watch. Little Len nearly sat backwards in the ditch, which ran with water. But he too managed to get a sight of Davy and the bag.

Davy was ten. His long, high-cheekboned, vigorous face was dirty-white; he had a streaming cold and no handkerchief; his dusty hair stood on end; his deep-set greyish eyes were wild with energy, and his eager limbs jerked here and there.

Joseph was eight. He had a round pink face, brown eyes that squinted slightly, ears that stuck out and glowed red like a rabbit's when light was behind them.

Little Len was only just seven, and small for that; with a scrap of a brown, monkeyish face and gaps between his front teeth. His legs did not seem much thicker than a robin's, and not nearly as firm.

And now the shrill voices of these excited boys rose in the quiet air, as Davy tugged from the straw frail a heavily weighted sack tied round the neck with rope. A bulgy sack which heaved. Little Len fairly screamed with excitement when he saw it heave.

Breathless, inadequately sniffing, Davy untied the rope, thrust his hand into the sack, groped, began to drag something out. Joseph leaned over, shouting advice and criticism.

But even Davy and Joseph were for a minute silent when the thing was before their eyes. Intensity of interest held them silent. For neither of them had ever before seen a cat so sick and so old as this; it seemed already more than half dead — yet, marvellously, it lived, though emaciated, weak, with flat blurred eyes and dribbling mouth. And even its fur was strange — coarse and rough, almost like a goat's hair to touch. Davy and Joseph were in a taut frenzy of excitement and interest.

Davy stroked the cat. 'Puss, Puss, wot's yer name, then, poor Puss?' The cat crouched in a curious stiff attitude, nose pressed to the earth, eyes nearly closed.

Then little Len spoke. 'Lemme see, lemme see!' And he pushed violently at Joseph, who blocked his view. He had hardly seen anything.

When he did see, he looked terribly astonished. He said nothing at all, but just stared and stared with his dark offended eyes, and bit hard at his left thumb.

'Oh, c'mon!' cried Davy suddenly. 'Shove 'en in an 'let's get down to bridge. Tell yer, if we did drop 'en in one side, 'e might come out on t'other!'

'Wouldn't!' cried Joseph.

'Would, then! Mike's cap did so, didn't 'en?' yelled Davy.

'This'n got a *stone*!' shrieked Joseph, pointing.

With his fierce face gone swiftly blank, Davy remarked grandly, in comparatively quiet tones, '*Stone* wouldn't stop 'en.' It was obvious that he had finished the argument. Joseph accepted this and stood panting, watching him scoop the cat into the sack again, knowing better than to join in.

Suddenly little Len said with terrific husky emphasis:

'*Swicked-cruel* to go drownin' a cat's wot's so poorly-like, *our* cat's not poorly an' *her's* not drown'd, this 'en an't *well* nuff to be drown'd!' And he pointed an accusing finger at Davy, at Joseph, at Davy, at Joseph — and kept this up, glaring, and biting his left thumb.

'An't cruel neither!' yelled Davy mechanically, with an uneasy side-glance at the pointing finger. And Joseph screamed, 'Shurru'p!' and shoved Len with his elbow.

'Wicked-cruel,' repeated little Len, regaining his balance, and continuing his pointing.

Davy knotted the rope round the sack with immense energy; dropped the sack; leaned back against the bank and with a hand either side of his mouth shouted at Joseph: 'Shurru'p yerself! Course 'tis wicked-cruel, 'n we an't goin' to do it, neither!'

He then leapt up, pushed Joseph one way, Len the other, jumped the ditch, and dancing about in the road proceeded to shout what they *were* going to do.

The softly grey sky broke in the west, and primrose light

streamed over the fields. Separate tall grasses on top of the high bank gleamed in this brief light. The children ran down the road into the light, as the road emerged from between the banks; and out of the light again, under the crooked willows near the river. They wheeled and charged up a muddy lane. The sack bumped Davy's leg, Joseph whirled the empty frail, behind them little Len came like a blown leaf.

At the end of this lane was a single cottage, its wall on the river-bank. Here lived little Len. The other two waited at the gate, and he ran past them and round the corner of the house. Then his thin little breathless voice could be heard. 'Minnie, Minnie, Min! Minnie, Minnie, Min!'

He came back running shakily, clutching to his chest an unperturbed tortoiseshell cat. It was evident that boy and cat were completely accustomed to each other's ways.

'Now we'll take t' sick 'un to *my* house,' said Davy. 'Put 'en in t' shed on my coat, an' when we've done our job for t' sixpence I'll give 'en milk an' everythink.'

All was over. Davy and Joseph leaned far out over the low stone bridge, trying to see the last possible thing down there . . . But they could see nothing at all.

The light had now faded from the western sky. Dusk deepened to darkness. Here and there down the quiet street, yellow lamps gleamed in cottage windows. The road made a paleness between dark fields, and then itself vanished under huge ancient trees. Two workmen on bicycles came along the road, rode over the bridge, tinkled their bells and were gone. The whole sky was pale, gentle, lustreless. In the silence could be heard the trickling ditch-water, as it passed beneath the road to reach the silently flowing river. Little Len heard this trickling water, as he lay on his face in the wet wayside grass, biting and biting his thumb, kicking and kicking with his small sticks of legs.

The Wages of Love

BY RHYD DAVIES

(From *Horizon*)

IT was a wet early November evening when Olga, after twelve years' disgraceful absence, arrived home again. The rusty mountains wept, the bobbing chrysanthemums in the back gardens were running with liquid coal-dust. A wind whipped through the dirty valley and rubbed stingingly at her silken legs. Above her ginger fur coat her sick done-in face peered like someone in awful woe.

She found no welcome. No one to meet her. Leaving her bags at the station, she climbed a steep road among sullen stony dwellings flung down like sneers on the world. At one of these, the nineteenth in a long row, she knocked timidly, her tongue licking over her dry lips. Wagons clanked under the slope below, backing out of the colliery yard. A woman in a shawl and man's cap hurried past, carrying a jug. After a long interval, the door opened and a bulky woman stood there, on her face a frown ready to develop into active hostility. The two were sisters.

'Sara,' murmured Olga timidly, 'you got my telegram?'

'Yes, I did. Telegram indeed! A fit I nearly had. Thought someone was dead. 'Stead of which,' she added in great grievance, 'you it is.' After blocking the doorway during this and narrowly scrutinizing her sister and the fur coat, she stood aside grudgingly. 'I s'pose you'd better come in. But I wonder you didn't go to Mary Ann's house, not come here . . . I hope the neighbours haven't seen you,' she went on in aversion.

Falteringly Olga entered. From the ajar doorway down the dark passage came subdued murmurs. 'There's some of the family,' Sara said, adding jeeringly: 'Come to have a look at you. Go in.'

Olga shrank. But hadn't she come back to seek forgiveness!

And to mortify her wicked flesh! Entering the kitchen, she made an effort to strengthen her sagging neck, that was still lovely, but once had been proud as a swan's. Around the family hearth of her childhood a ring of hostile faces looked up in the red firelight. Red, angry faces.

This was the Prodigal Daughter: the Black Sheep: the Family Disgrace. Whose tricks (they declared, in spite of an operation for gall-stones) had sent her mother to the grave, her father following not long afterwards. This was she who had wounded irreparably the family honour, stained its chaste history. Her sisters never sat in chapel now but with deflated seats.

'Fur coat, ha!' Blodwen, her other sister, screeched. 'Come down here to show off, has she!'

'More likely,' Sara barked, 'down and out she is, and come to live on our poor backs. They got to dress up. Strumpet!'

'Light a lamp,' called Twmos, Blodwen's husband, 'and let us see her plain.' The lamp was lit. They saw her pinched, defeated face, her sunken eyes, and their power rose.

'What you come back for?' cried Blodwen, blue with rage. 'Don't the men look at you no more?'

'Hush, the neighbours will hear,' exclaimed Sara. 'And she must be hid.'

'Only a coffin'll ever hide the same as her,' groaned Blodwen.

Sara's husband Evan, with a face like a pious goat, sharpened his two front teeth on his lip. He had never seen the famous sister before. The two men were dominated by their bellicose wives, and looked at her bleakly down their noses. She stood mute and haggard amid the jabbering abuse. It was her punishment and she accepted it. After a while she sank into a chair and bowed her head. Desolate silence was in her broken eyes. She looked like one who bled from some awful secret agony.

'What's come of that elderly brush-manufacturer that kept you?' taunted Sara. 'Left you in the gutter, no doubt.'

'And the grand foreigner with the diamonds,' sneered Blod. 'Looking for someone younger now, eh?'

'And the big stockbroker with the gouty feet, ha? And the fifty

more! Hussy!’ screamed Sara, forgetting the neighbours in her wrath. ‘She comes back like a bag of bad old ’tatoes.’

Evan lifted his two teeth: ‘Miss Olga, sloppy it is to come back here tail between legs. Foreign to us you are now.’

At last Olga whimpered: ‘I want to come back and rest; I want, I want —’ The hot kitchen swirled round her, she flopped off the chair to the floor. ‘They stared at her in anger.

‘Damme, ill she is,’ said Twmos.

‘A glass of cold water chuck in her painted face,’ sang Blod.

‘Put her to bed here I shall be obliged to!’ wailed Sara. ‘In my clean sheets! What’s the matter with the duffer?’

They had planned to send her flying, after they had unloaded their opinions of her, up to Mary Ann’s cottage hidden in the mountains. Mary Ann was the fourth sister and not quite right in the head. She was to keep the trollop where no one would see her. But what did the disgrace want to come back for! Was she greedily after her share of goods left by poor mam and dad that she had sent to the grave? She shouldn’t have it, the bad ape.

‘Her fine feathers been plucked proper, plain it is,’ declared Blod. ‘Something bad’s the matter with her. Best to put her to bed, Sara,’ she added, gratified that the baggage wouldn’t be sullyng *her* house, down the valley. ‘And throw her out soon as she’s got her legs back.’

It had to be done. But for some days Olga tossed in a fever. No doctor was called, and the presence of the disgrace was kept secret from the district. All the family were great members of Salem, the Baptist chapel on the hill: Blod’s husband was even a deacon. Horrible if it was found that the outcast had come back. But more horrible still if she died on them, so that her sinful carcase would have to be buried from Sara’s clean house. The provoked Sara nursed her with malign art, not wanting her to die and yet wanting it. She said presently to the wan thin woman: ‘Broth you want, and poultry — for out of my house you must get, quick. Haven’t you got no money? Only a few shillings there is in your purse. Coming back here,’ she began to rage, ‘and expecting hard-working persons to feed your useless flesh. Ach, you bitch, get better.’

'I'm thirsty,' Olga whimpered.

'Well,' jeered Sara, 'think I've got champagne for you?

Olga then whispered this: 'I've got over five hundred pounds in the bank.'

Sara laid down the cup of cold water she was bringing and excitedly called downstairs to the kitchen: 'Evan, put the kettle on. Poor Olga would like a cup of tea. Fetch nice cakes from the shop and a pot of bloater paste.' To Olga she said: 'There now, there now, very upset I've been, and my tongue running away with me. But nursing you I've been like a hospital. See, there's better you are! Let me comb your hair and wash your face tidy now.'

And she freshened the room. The dusty ever on the washstand she cleaned and filled with water, brought a tablet of scented soap and a new pink towel; she plucked chrysanthemums from the back-garden. Then, after feeding the trollop, she took shawl and umbrella and rushed down to her sister Blod's house.

Olga didn't get well, however. Some days she opened her empty eyes and whimpered that she wanted to go to chapel, other days she cowered down in the sheets and wouldn't speak. Something awful was consuming her. But visitors began to fill her room, including cousins and aunts and uncles from right down the valley, who used to declare that never would they go near her — no, not even to attend her funeral. Only Mary Ann, being in her head but fourteen ounces to the pound, was kept out of the news. The first visitor was Blodwen, who brought a tapioca pudding and wheedled:

'Olga, you never seen my son Ivor! Growing up he is now and wants to be a Baptist minister. But there's expensive are the college fees! "Oh, dear me," I said to him, "no, Ivor, you must go and work in the pits like your father, for poor as dirt are your hard-working parents." But wouldn't it be grand for our family, Olga, if we had a chapel minister in it! Our sister Sara was saying it would wipe out a lot, indeed.'

Cousin Margiad appeared and said: 'Well, Olga! When better you are a visit you must pay me. But very poor my house is — my Willie John hasn't been working for two years. I been praying

a long time for a suite of furniture for the parlour, then I could take a school-teacher lodger —'

Sara asked with loving bullying: 'Your will you've made, Olga? Better you're getting, but best it is to be on the safe side, and if you go before me I'll bury you first-class, I promise. To go on with, shall I borrow ten quid off you at once? Wages been dropping in the pit,' she groaned, 'and if I don't find money soon, bums will be knocking on the door and turn us all out.'

Aunt Gwen boldly asked for a piano and a pair of tortoiseshell glasses to replace her old pince-nez. Evan asked for a motor-bike and Twmos wanted a pair of greyhounds.

They walked in and out of her room daily, waiting till she was well enough to grant their requests. Sara got her bags up from the station and was astonished at the silks and satins therein: she tucked them away in her cupboards. Carefully she fed Olga with broths, to keep her awhile from Jordan's brink. Not that Olga would eat much. Her great hollow eyes stared emptily, her wrinkling flesh had no more life than tissue paper.

At last Sara cried out in cursed exasperation: 'What's the matter with you? Repenting too much you are. Bad you've been, but others in this world have been badder. Tell me now when you're ready for that cheque book out of your bag.'

Olga babbled strangely: 'I want to go to chapel next Sunday.' She wanted to go to Salem, the chapel of her childhood, where she had been pure!

'No, no,' said Sara hurriedly, 'not yet. Very cold it is there, the heating system's broken down.' And downstairs she said to the family: 'Is she going daft like our Mary Ann! Wants to go to chapel, if you please, like we do!'

'She started to go wrong,' Blod mused, 'after Johnny Williams got killed.' Johnny had courted Olga long, long ago, till he got caught under a fall of roof in the pit. In the far-away days of her chaste girlhood.

Sara said: 'There's a lesson to us all she is! No kick in her now. Falling apart she is like a rotten old cask.'

'Yes,' Blod began to screech, 'but she's been dancing her jigs

plenty in London while we stayed by here respectable and working our fingers to the bone.'

They resumed their wheedling of the ailing slut: they put pen into her yellow hand and promised visits to chapel when she was better. And before long Blod got two hundred pounds for the education of her son Ivor: the rest of the family, desirous of the glory of a minister therein, agreed she had first claim. But all the others too, except Mary Ann, got their advantages from her repentance, the purchases ranging in size from a suite of furniture down to a hymnbook in soft black leather. Sara paid off the mortgage she had raised on the house: times had been bad in the pits. 'Then, all this done, she went bustling upstairs one dark evening.

'Get up, Olga. Arranged we have for you to go and stay with Mary Ann. Very healthy up there in the mountains, you will get well quicker. Come now.' Olga wept and moaned. But her sister pulled the thin, shrinking body out of the bed and shoved old garments on it. In the deserted lane back of the house was Evan with his new motor-bike. Olga, shivering and dazed in the winter damp, was strapped to him behind.

Off they went. Up the valley and bumping across a naked mountain by the Old Roman road: down to a vale where there was only a little pit and a couple of farms. 'Then up the side of a dark mountain, sour in the winter, where sheep coughed. Mary Ann's cottage clung to its side like a pimple. The cottage smelt of the dozen cats that she worshipped. She squinted down dubiously at her panting sister as the bike whizzed away, and said: 'Drat me, Olga, don't know I do how there's room for you and the cats in my bed. But we'll manage.'

Mary Ann was good-hearted: her mind had never opened properly, and it purred like her cats. The damp cottage was small as a henhouse: every day she walked two miles to work at a farm, earning seven shillings a week and milk for the cats. She was strong, chewed shag, and spat on the floor like a man. Olga's past life was vague in her mind.

'Let me sleep,' whimpered Olga; 'I want to sleep. Then when I'm better we must go to chapel. I want to sing and pray.' Her

quenched face had gone stiff as a dead sparrow. The cats jumped about her, frisky: some were wild as the mountain wind gnawing at the cottage.

Picking her nose, Mary Ann cogitated. 'Where's your husband?' she said at length.

Moaning, Olga wept in misery and repentance: 'I've been a bad woman.'

'All of us are bad women,' said Mary Ann comfortably, 'here below.' But her mind couldn't stay fixed for long on anything and she said, 'Let me see if I can spare a drop of milk from the cats' suppers. There's hungry the little angels are always! Cold in the face you look.' She spared a small cup of the bluish mountain milk.

Olga did not get well up in the mountain cottage. And even Mary Ann began to grumble at the tossings and weepings beside her in the bed: the cats were disturbed. Sometimes Olga cried out loud in her agony of spirit. During the day she tried to read the Bible, but there was little strength in her arms to hold up the stout book. One cat there was who became enamoured of her and leapt on her shoulders continually. Her soul began to gutter out completely. One night she panted for a minister to be brought her.

'Hush,' scolded Mary Ann gently, 'past ten o'clock it is and Mr. Isaac Rowlands is cosy in bed by the side of his wife with her red hair.'

'I want to confess,' moaned Olga.

Mary Ann soothed: 'Old he is and never climbs mountains. You tell me the confess to-morrow and I will deliver it with his milk on the way home. There, now, go to sleep.'

The next day Olga, alone in the cottage, wandered out in a daze, her nightshift flapping about her bony body. All around the mountains spread gleaming white and pure as the mountains of heaven. Crying for God's minister, she was found by a shepherd in the vale and shoved into the policeman's cottage. Delivered back to Mary Ann, in a week she was dead.

Mary Ann, excited, stayed away from the farm and walked over the mountain to Sara, who called a conference. And the purring Mary Ann was told: 'Buried from your cottage she must be, quiet by there. A grand coffin will be sent up to you, and one hearse.'

'And carriages too,' said Mary Ann placidly, 'for the mourners.' She was proud to have a funeral start from her house.

'No mourners,' shouted Sara, who was wearing a fine silk blouse. 'She don't deserve it, the life she led. Good people don't sit behind a Jezebel alive or dead.'

The cheapest coffin in Undertaker Jenkins's price-list arrived in Mary Ann's cottage. But she said to the bringer: 'The day of the funeral send one carriage up to follow the hearse. For me, and cost to be paid by me, Mary Ann.' The funeral day, however, Sara took it into her head to come over, in a tight ginger fur coat, and when she saw the carriage drive up with the hearse and Mary Ann ready in black, she pushed the shocking woman into a chair and hissed: 'You want to disgrace the family, you stupid rabbit!' For ten minutes she forced into Mary Ann's mind knowledge of Olga's wickedness: in the end Mary Ann sat with dropped jaw and popping eyes.

So it was that an empty carriage went behind the thin narrow coffin that had no varnish on its wood, no flower on its breast.

The disgrace safely underground, not long afterwards Blod brought up to Sara's house the first letter from her college boy and, settling her new glasses, read it out to the assembled family. He was doing fine and asked for a new black suit.

'That'll be a day,' sighed Sara, 'when we hear his first sermon.'

Evan lifted his goat's teeth: 'Perhaps a comfort it'll be to Olga too, where the mare is, down in the hot.'

'Do not speak disrespectful of the dead, Evan,' admonished Blod prudently. She folded the letter away into her new leather handbag. 'Poor Olga!' she mused. 'And she so pretty at one time. I used to brag about her in Sunday-school, long ago. Her face was bright as a daisy and her bosoms like spicy fairy-cakes.' She shook her new gay earrings. 'But too soft she was, too loving.'

'Yes, indeed,' sighed Sara, who was altering a pink silk petticoat that was too small for her, 'and no head for business. A softie like our Mary Ann. Not a diamond ring on her finger, and there's paltry in the bank, when you come to think of all those years!'

The Black House

BY MARGIAD EVANS

(From *The Welsh Review*)

SEVENTY or more years ago there stood in the forest parish of Gwias Harold a public-house called the Nag's Head. But in compliment to the landlord's mother, who was supposed to be a witch, it was locally known as the Owld Hag's Head, or the Black House.

They called the old woman Aunt Flinty Knuckles: it was said that she could serve anything from harmless bread and candle-grease pills to the most virulent curses, and that she did a regular trade straight from hell to hand, across the threshold. But apart from this sinister squint in its reputation, the Black House was quiet for the district, with no excessive drinking, no fighting, and above all — no spilling of its secrets through babbling liquor.

But there was one man who swore to the day of his death that he met black company in the bar. He was the squire, Hercules Harold, a nervously inquisitive young man whose solitary up-bringing among the mild shaded beauty of Gwias had bred in him an unnatural appetite for dismal things and dark tales. As a boy he had felt the 'queerness' of the Black House, and as a man the feeling grew with the odd whispers the Forest breathed about it. When he became squire he used occasionally to enter, and he always noticed that the landlord, an irascible man with the sombre presence of the Forester, was extremely careful to dispose of his squireship by putting him to sit in a little room by himself at the back of the bar, afterwards escorting him off the premises, with somewhat the air of a conscious guardian.

The room where Hercules used to enjoy what might be termed a little public solitude had a heavy door with a small square of thick glass let into it. And many a night he would cautiously

watch them through it, for he relished the tales and hints of Flinty Knuckles' contracts with the nether powers.

One wet night he was reaching for his whip and shaking himself down inside his collar when he became aware of an unusual silence outside: he had been dreaming over the coals and in his melancholy abstraction had heard nothing more than the wind blowing down the rain, but now he asked himself why they were so quiet in the bar, and putting his forehead to the glass he peered out.

With one exception the company was of the usual brew; but that one was a potent addition. He was a man with bunches of wild hair frothing under his beaver hat and a long threadbare coat hanging stiffly from his shoulders to his heels with the firelight shining through it. His nose was like a drop of lead above a shapeless mouth, and he had a pair of cold sleety little eyes — wicked eyes without light or hope or humanity. Such were the most marked features of this peculiar being who was standing in the middle of the hearth pulling at his dirty neckcloth which was hanging outside the rest of his ragged clothes. Behind him was Flinty Knuckles, grey and sharp as cat ice with her starved hands folded on the back of a chair.

The door was too solid for Hercules to overhear the conversation; but from the nods and shakings of heads he judged it to be argumentative. Suddenly the man spun round and, plunging his naked hand into the fire, clutched a burning faggot, and laying it across both palms rolled it to and fro as coolly as a woman handles a copper stick, in spite of the fact that it was red with flame and sparks, and grained with fire.

Every man slanted away from the stranger as from a thing infected by the Evil One: but the squire's reading had educated him in trickery. He opened the door and joined the company. They did not seem exhilarated by the honour: there was a shuffling, glowering, and shaping of dumb oaths, as if they had their teeth in something they had no wish to share with him.

Only the stranger smiled, and when Hercules demanded where he had learned such a thing, replied to his surprise in the voice of a gentleman: 'That was not a trick, sir. If you think it was, pray

try it yourself,' and made as if to pass the faggot to the squire. But Hercules declined to take it, so with a sneer the stranger threw it back on the fire and kicked it into blazing flakes. 'A simple little thing, sir, simple, just an example of control,' he declared, as he stood coolly dusting his hands on his cloak.

'What do you mean? Control of what?' the squire asked. 'Of yourself?'

The stranger grinned. 'Of myself and legions of others. *Legions*,' he repeated. All the time he kept fingering his hat — taking it off and putting it on again, looking inside it, throwing it up and catching it — 'Oh, there are strange blank fields in the educated mind. I don't expect to meet with anything but ignorance,' he remarked, looking sidelong at his listeners. Hercules recalled the old story of the Devil's yearly walk from door to door, getting human souls by beguilement: as he paid for the stranger's beer it came into his mind and filled him with a characteristic craving to see what more was possible. Looking into those evil opposite eyes he fancied that they had their masters invisible.

'Tell me, are other people easy to control?' he asked.

'Yes, in certain moods of fear or bravado. If I might choose one out of you, I could show you what I can do. It is quite harmless.'

Flinty Knuckles spoke suddenly: 'Won't tha friend step in and be tried on?'

The stranger scowled. 'What do you mean? I'm alone.'

'Oh, bist thou?' she said with a smile. 'I did think as tha had somebody with tha.'

He seemed to laugh, but his glance was vicious. 'Well, you can all see for yourselves,' he said, spreading his cloak, 'there is nobody hiding under this.'

'I can see further nor that nor thee: but I did mean the gentleman who is waiting outside the door. But p'raps him have summat better to do — him and the Lord,' she leered.

He flashed round with a face like something spat out of a volcano. 'Curse your impudence, you old Bedlamite! It's none of your business to contradict your customers. If you can't keep your witch's mouth shut, I'll go!' he roared.

'Oh, I shouldn't do that, master — un be a dark night and him's waiting.'

'Hang you, woman, go and look for yourself!' he shouted, and pushed the lamp into her hand. Off she went very erect and stern, opened the door and looked outside. 'Tha be in the right of it, master — there bain't nothing there but darkness.'

The squire never forgot the way she hurled the words in passing; nor the company who with their dark-edged faces leant against the settle silent and watchful; nor how she and the stranger ground glances as if they were two powers hating yet understanding each other, and standing alone in their initiation.

'Now are you all satisfied?' the stranger demanded, turning from Flinty Knuckles to the company in general. Picking up a few nods here and there, he proceeded, 'Well, then, if one of you will volunteer to put himself into my hand, we can try a little experiment.'

Immediately the blacksmith, one Thomas Harris, stepped forward. 'Tom was a happy-natured man of that shrewd and pithy type which grows like a wayside weed in every village lane. Tom would have shared a joke with a deaf-mute or got a smile out of a parson at prayer.

'You're the man for me. I swear that no harm shall come to you and you'll go home as merry as you are at this moment,' said the stranger as he led the young smith into the middle of the floor. Suddenly he withdrew a pace and examining Tom with peculiar intensity inquired, 'Tell me, what would you do if you were ever to meet Original Evil face to face?'

'What be that?' the smith asked.

'The Owld 'un — thic Devil him do mean, but him dursen't say the word,' shouted a testy old poacher in a rabbitskin coat.

'Oh, him! I ood clap an iron shoe on him's hoof so as the reverences could hear him coming,' replied Tom with a round laugh.

'That's the spirit,' said the stranger with a furtive sneer at the squire. 'That's the lad for me.'

He made one of his abrupt turns which caused his cloak to stick to his body like the black blight round a fat bean stalk.

'Now, tie him up in yonder chair so that he can't loose himself. Tie him till he can't stir. Tie him with his hands behind him.'

A carter with wagon ropes was called in to help secure the blacksmith to the heavy oak chair; and inside two minutes the lusty Tom was a meek prisoner. When they had finished their rope riddle, the stranger walked round to see if they had left any loose ends.

'That will do,' said he. 'If I had a grudge against my young friend in this chair, I could not wish for a better meeting.'

'Now, when I say three blow out the lamp and two of you must take hold of me so that you will know if I make any movement. I shall count fifty and then you can light the lamp. Mrs. Landlord, hadn't you better bolt the back door? Now — one — two — three.'

The lamp was extinguished but the firelight revealed here and there a gaunt feature, a tooth, a fold of leathery cheek, or glowed in a liquid eye like its own soul. Tom, in the chair, was a rugged island in the middle of the reddish darkness.

'It isn't dark enough!' the stranger was heard to cry, and then, in a changed and triumphant voice, 'No — yes — it will be!' and he began steadily to count away the silence.

To the squire the darkness did seem much denser after the first few seconds; it seemed to sag downwards from the rafters and to press on his senses. The obscurity was a pit in which pulsed a rhythmic voice. He found himself framing a prayer for light. The next instant there came a sound as of ropes being violently thrown to the floor and a bellowing groan of the man in the chair. A voice, hoarse, strangled, and scarcely recognizable as Tom's, cried out: 'The lamp; for God's sake, the lamp!'

'I smell hell,' a man stuttered, and in the confused moment before they managed to light the lamp the mass of them could be felt palpitating in the denned madness of fear.

Someone lit the lamp: it flared up and showed their shadows ringed around the chair where Tom was sprawling unconscious and with twitching eyelids, the ropes scattered and his arm hanging limply to the floor. The air was black with terror and primitive rage. One glance at the men and the stranger, no longer grinning

or gloating, was cowering behind the table. The landlord had to hold them off him while he squeezed himself abjectly against the wall, the sweat speckling his white face like the mildew on a cheese.

'Stand off the maggoty dog! I ool have no murder here!' the landlord panted, and Flinty Knuckles screamed, 'Back, men!' with a look which seemed to open a chasm between them and their prey.

'I give you my word that I've done nothing to him,' the stranger gasped. 'Don't let them get me,' he implored Flinty Knuckles, stuffing money into her hand. 'Here, give them drinks — give them anything they want, but don't let them touch me.'

She flung down the coins and the far, all-seeing stare in her eye blazed out and quelled their weaker fire.

'Pick up thy money, master: us baint drinkers o' thy brew. Take it and buy black for they carrion crows: go home and go steady and do what thou must while thou hast time. I ool lay thee out, aye, I ool be there.'

She bent her head and her words seemed to roll over his face like a cloud. Then she faced the others and they were afraid to cross the line of her vision.

'Rest thy heart's content,' she said, and pointing to the stranger: 'Leave thic to they underground worms. Tha doesn't go to hurt a dead man — bist all done for thee. Carry Tom home quietly, my butties, and rest easy.'

Hercules had been holding a candle to the blacksmith's twitching face, but at the grim sound of Flinty Knuckles's voice he turned his head and then he dropped the candle as if his arm had withered, and in his ears rang his own screaming. For there, as it seemed on the edge of the table, he saw sidelong and over his shoulders a thing resting — an indescribable thing — a thing like a cloven hoof.

He ran from that dreadful revelation, and when he next knew himself he was outside in the road. It was very dark; but opposite he thought he saw a man standing under the trees. If so, he was scarcely more than a length of deeper darkness; yet out of nothing a pair of eyes met his — eyes which in some preternatural way seemed to be the stranger's, and which glistened with all the evil

hunger of all human and bestial life. The squire saw it crouching beastlike and demonic in the gusty shadows — a creature hovering near its victim and its mate. Behind it the trees rose harsh as rocks to the loose and shaken sky — and the wind flowed between them.

But as he stood fixed at his end of the vision the door was flung open and through it the stranger was hurled into the night. He stumbled to his feet mumbling some wild strange talk like a creature blundering in the shallows of its gloomy element. Then seeing the landlord's face pressed against the lighted window, he rallied, and with a ragged swagger swung across the road singing in a voice as tuneless as rusty tin:

‘Come up, Daddy,
And Mother come down;
And this is the way
To London town.’

As he reached the trees on the other side of the road they blotted him out with the other figure: the squire heard the ailing voice for a little while through the sough of the branches and the flutter of the leaves — and then, silence.

He Had Been Told

BY WALTER GLADDEN

(From *The Manchester Guardian*)

THE woman who had got in at the junction looked with pitying interest at the small boy sitting bolt upright in the middle of the seat, taking in the face that was just too round, the cheeks that were just too pink and white, the neck that was just too square, the expression that was just too unself-conscious. She could see the name Karl Hetts on the identity disk that hung prominently on his chest. The girl in the corner nudged her.

'Refugee,' she whispered.

The woman's interest was quickened. She leaned forward.

'Do you mind if I have a look at that nice identity disk of yours?' she asked.

'Certainly, madam,' said the small boy importantly, and taking it off handed it to her.

It was some three inches across, covered with cellophane and bordered with leather. 'Karl Hetts,' she read. 'Passenger from London to Twyford. Change at Stockham, Sunderland, Hume, and Maybury.'

'And are you travelling all that way by yourself?' she asked.

'Yes, madam,' answered Karl Hetts.

'And changing at all those places?'

'No, madam,' said Karl Hetts, in English that was just not English. 'I did not need to change at Sunderland. The carriage was through.'

'Through coach,' murmured the cattle-dealer in the far corner. 'Going back to school, my boy?'

'Yes, sir. The school is at Beacham.'

'All that way by yourself, hey? Haven't you any brothers or sisters?'

'No, sir. No brothers, no sisters, no father, no mother, nothing.' He said it quite brightly. A shudder passed round the carriage. 'Poor little beggar,' said the workman opposite the cattle-dealer. 'What's the world coming to?'

The boy took back his identity disk with a word of grave thanks, and hung it round his neck. He was well dressed in English clothes but there was no badge on his cap.

'You look quite English,' said the girl in the corner, intending it as a compliment.

'I am not English,' said Karl Hetts soberly. 'I am Cherman.'

Nobody spoke for some time. It was difficult to know what to say. The train clattered onward. The boy seemed to feel that something was demanded of him.

'It is a good school,' he said carefully.

The tension broke. Karl Hetts was so obviously willing to please.

'Do you like school in England?' asked the woman.

'Yes, madam,' replied the boy.

'And what do you learn there?'

'I learn English, French, arithmetic, geography, history, music, and Scripture,' he replied at once.

'Music?' said the cattle-dealer. 'Can you sing?'

'Yes, sir. Would you like me to sing to you?'

There was a stir of anticipation in the carriage.

'They can sing,' said the cattle-dealer. 'I remember when I was in the prison camp at Wittenberg—"Gefangenlage," they called it—we used to hear 'em singing as they marched past. Good tunes, but I never learned the words.'

'Where did they get you?' asked the workman.

'La Bassée, in '15.'

'Never there. First on the Somme, then Ypres. That finished me. I've got the bullet at home.'

Both men had begun to frown. The boy spoke again.

'Would you like me to sing to you?' he repeated.

'Why, yes, sonny,' said the cattle-dealer, uncreasing his brow as the black memories rolled back. 'Sing something nice.'

'Shall I sing in English or in German? I can sing in French too.'

'Goo' Lor'!' said the workman. 'He's a clever little 'un. Let's hear the French. Ain't heard a French song since the war.'

Karl Hetts fixed his eyes on the ceiling of the carriage, took a deep breath through his nose, mentally pitched a note, and began.

'Il y avait une bergère,' he piped, in a high, true voice, and on through all the verses of the song.

'That's very nice,' said the workman. 'Now a German one.'

Nobody could understand the words of this, but the cattle-dealer puckered his brow.

'I've heard the prison guards sing that one,' he said. 'What's it about?'

'It is the song of the Lorelei,' explained the boy. 'She sits on a rock and sings.'

'Well, never mind,' said the cattle-dealer abruptly. 'Now an English one.'

Karl Hetts duly obliged with 'John Peel.'

'Lumme!' muttered the workman. 'Sings it just like an English kid.'

Karl Hetts basked in the admiration of the carriage for some moments. Then he relaxed.

'Let us play!' he ordered.

'What can you play?' asked the woman.

'Play war!' said the boy excitedly, and 'Woo-oo-oo-oo-oo!' he chanted, describing a series of loops with his hands. 'Woo-oo-oo-oo-oo!' His voice rose and fell, rose, sank, rose to a scream. 'Woo-oo-ooosh! That was a bomb. You're dead!'

'Oh, we're dead, are we?' said the workman, a trifle grimly. 'That's over, then.'

'No, it is not over,' insisted the boy. 'Woo-oo-oo! Rat-tat-tat-tat! Woo-oo-oo! Rat-tat-tat-tat-tat! Woo-oo-oo!' His voice died away. 'That was a machine-gun,' he explained.

There was a dead silence as he looked round for applause, and for the first time he seemed a little crestfallen. The woman hastened to change the subject.

'How will you go on when you get to Twyford?' she asked.

'They will meet me,' said Karl Hetts with confidence. 'I have been told.'

'But suppose they don't?'

'But they will. I have been told.'

'But suppose —'

'I have been told!'

'He's a German, all right,' muttered the workman.

Ap Towy'n

BY GERAINT GOODWIN

(From *The Welsh Review*)

THE Sergeant of Police went up to the doors of the manse, along the old brick path, overgrown with moss that lost itself in the wilderness. Bending under the tumbled broken arbours, gingerly, he rubbed his neck with a wry face at a shower of drops shaken down by his heavy tread.

Then at the door he threw up his shoulders defiantly, pulled out a red bandanna handkerchief, and blew his great nose in a snort.

'Strong action!' he said.

The time had come to make a stand. But he did not hope for too much. The Reverend Joshua Davies, benign, with a white curl of hair and mild unquestioning eyes like a bewildered ewe lost in the morass of this world, was not the man for strong action. Life seemed to the old minister to be something like this garden of his, always breaking the order imposed on it, and all he did was to raise meek and ineffectual hands in bewilderment and say, 'Dear me, dear me!'

He was a scholar, a very eminent scholar, and his incursion into local politics had never been happy, nor had his influence been profound.

The Sergeant was in his *set fawr* or Big Pen and was his right hand. He was, in a sense, the church militant, with a red, fierce face, and a harsh scrub of whiskers, whitening now like hoarfrost, and big, humorous ears.

He had been in South Wales as a young man, had been converted to the cause of temperance long ago, about the time of his second marriage. The conversion had been sudden, and in spite of all the surprised laughter, grimly held. He had many things to

contend against, not least the knowledge of his young life that had travelled northwards, as these things do — and his nose, which was the living and unalterable symbol of it.

But now, as is often the way with converts, he had turned on this old life with unrestrained fury, like an old love lost, and remembered only in hate.

And now the two men were going to discuss the forthcoming *gwyl ddirwestol*, the annual temperance gathering.

The Sergeant strode across the book-lined study, hands clasped fiercely behind his back, while the old minister watched him in dismay.

Then the Sergeant as suddenly turned and flung up his fist. 'The Goat, the Barley Mow, the Green Dragon . . . all up!' He shot his hands violently towards the ceiling. 'Last week! Four barrels at the Bell alone!'

'Dear me! Do you really mean that they drank *four* barrels at that little place? However on earth did they manage it, William?'

'How? Huh — I can well understand how! The damn gluttons. So what *is* the good of processions and banners and the Silver Band (*myn ufferni*, there's two trombones, beauties, that I know of), sermons, and all the rest of it when we're going down and down and . . . DOWN?'

'Yes, yes. True enough. We are preaching to the converted. But what is to be done, what *is* to be done?'

The old minister brought his hands flat down on the desk before him and swung round in his swivel chair. Then he took off his spectacles and rubbed them slowly, very carefully, with his pocket handkerchief. When he had put them back he had recovered something of his self-possession.

'Well, Mister Davies —'

'Go on, William.'

The Sergeant raised his grizzled head and gave a savage swipe to his whiskers. Then he smote a great fist with a loud whack on to his open palm.

'Strong action! The only way, sir.'

He glared round the room as though to annihilate all opposition.

'Quietly now, William.' I am a man of peace and you are a man of —'

'Warr! Warr to the death!'

'Well — we'll say a man of unbridled enthusiasms.'

Mr. Davies put his hands flat on his kneecaps and stared stolidly into the empty grate, trying to collect his thoughts. Then he began.

'There are times when one wants to do this and that and sometimes one feels . . . well, that perhaps one is going about things the wrong way. But are we, William? It is better to persist through kindness and grace, however hard the road might be. To keep on hoping that perhaps the voice of truth will triumph in the end. If not . . . where is our faith?' The old man held his hands out in appeal and went on: 'To trust your fellow man as a brother —'

'Aye — you trust a man with a pint and see what happens.'

The old man ran a hand wearily over his head.

'But surely, surely we can *persuade*: we can proclaim the truth loud enough, can carry the message into the camp of the enemy. The truth *must* prevail.'

'A public meeting, you mean?'

'A public meeting is certainly an idea. Anything you like, but not . . . not . . .' He shook his white head violently in disgust at the possible alternative, the naming of malefactors from the pulpit. 'That is abhorrent to me.'

The Sergeant pulled out his bandanna handkerchief and blew his nose violently.

'Not a bit of use — nor forty public meetings.'

'Now, why, William? Let us be reasonable. What on earth is the good of condemning a thing before it is even tried? Nothing has ever been done that way. The victory is theirs by our default, without as much as a voice — as a *voice* — raised in protest.'

The Sergeant suffered the rebuke in poor grace, fixed him with a raw, fierce eye, and then stoved an accusing finger into space.

'Aye — but what sort of a voice, Mister Davies?'

He stopped with the light of triumph in his eye and then, to the unasked question, went on:

'What sort of voice — that's the point. Second-raters plenty. Any amount any day of the week. But second-raters aren't going to fill the Town Hall — not with the temptation there is in other places.'

'Well, well, my good man. What *do* you suggest?'

'Sink or swim!'

'Really, William, you mean well, but it is extremely difficult to know what you do mean.'

'A top-notcher or nothing. 'There it is in a nutshell.'

He flung his hands over his head in his impatience and went stumping on his heavy feet across the floor.

'Well — there is something to be said for *that*. But where are we going to get this — this top-notcher, as you call him? And' — he pulled out a drawer and ran hurriedly over the leaves of a note-book — 'and by the time we have paid for the band and the hire of the hall and incidental expenses there will be left — let me see — exactly three and eightpence halfpenny.'

He snapped the book to and slipped it back into the drawer again.

'Aye — a nuisance!'

'Not a nuisance, William, but hard facts.'

'Aye, aye. The same thing.'

The Sergeant wheeled round in disgust, clasping his head. Then he went back in a rush, unable to hold in his inspiration.

'Ap Towyn!'

The old minister folded his hands and cocked his head in thought, and then went on: "A very able man . . . unquestionably an able man. But very wild, *very* wild!"

The old Sergeant snorted in answer. 'A genius!'

'Well — a genius if you like. But as someone has said, it is the common people who take possession, William. A step at a time. What they come to slowly they hold on to fast. And it is something worth remembering.' He got up and patted the Sergeant on the shoulder. 'And truth is a slow business, William. I am an old man now, but I would not like to say that I know so *very* much more than my fellows; perhaps a little more tolerant as the years have

gone by, but that is all. I have never touched a drop in my life, William, but I have known men who have — *men*, William, down in South Wales who, when it was a question of life and death —

‘Aye, aye. So have I.’

It reminded the Sergeant too quickly of his past. He had a blue scar across his nose, and the nose itself spoke of the days gone by.

‘Well — Ap Towyn, then?’ he threw out in final challenge.

‘Very well, William. We can but try.’

‘Dear me,’ he mused quietly, after the Sergeant had gone, summoning up the image of the bard ‘I don’t know if I have done right; I don’t, really. It is not that I envy these men of genius, but I distrust them. Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel, and yet . . . they do excel, after all. Tut, tut! I am getting trivial, yes, trivial.’

And so he thought again of this bewildering figure, then at the height of his powers, one of those strange creatures that a nation throws up once in a generation: poet, choir conductor, something of a politician, something of a great many things indeed. And, on top of everything, he was a spellbinder. As Gladstone would have said, he absorbed the vapour and returned it in the flood. *D.wch*, but when he got going he was tremendous, even in a country where oratory was as common as daylight. With a great black hat like a sombrero struck violently on his head, a magnificent flashing eye that strayed away into infinity, and a sonorous voice rolling like distant thunder, his restless spirit drove him like a prophet of Israel over all North Wales. You would see him on a second-hand motor-bike tearing from here to there and from there to somewhere else. Why, whither — no one knew.

For a brief space at college he had been a Mohammedan, and then in successive terms a Brahmin, an atheist, a free-thinker, and a Mormon, scandalizing his family, which was a bulwark of the Calvinistic-Methodist faith. And all the time he contrived to remain — the Hope of Wales. The great men had their day, but his day was dawning. He was knocking at the door of a nation, and soon the door would be opened,

The great day arrived at last. On the steps of the Town Hall the Sergeant, red and florid in his duties, wrung the old minister's hand in a fervent clutch.

'The memorial day has come,' he got out in his excitement.

'Let us hope, William — that everything will go off according to plan.'

'Like a trout upstream!'

He waved his hand round the old hall, festooned with banners and bunting, and on the green distemper walls, like fiery emblems, the posters in red type:

MONSTER RALLY

and in bigger type still, running through the middle:

AP TOWYN

They were on every hoarding in the town, in the windows of shops, tied round the boles of trees.

'Look at the people!' he shouted in triumph, pointing to a town already full.

Ap Towyn had stipulated that there was to be no reception on his arrival. The Silver Band had been called off in accordance with his wishes. He likened himself to a prophet who moved as other men, whose voice was the exhalation of all men, called up and lost again. Not for him the fanfare of trumpets, the civic receptions. He brushed them all aside as the tribute paid to the great ones of the earth. He came alone and he walked alone until he met his people. Then, with the gleam of the prophet, a hand clasped to his chin and his shoulders bunched around him, he would begin, summoning up the spirit. And when he began . . .

'Nothing like a name,' the Sergeant shouted sideways as they hurried along to the station.

'Put not your trust in princes, William.'

'Aye, aye.'

He was not listening. He went on stamping up and down the platform in his impatience. Then he saw the black feather of smoke spreading into the dusk far up the line. They put themselves into an attitude of welcome, standing there on the platform edge.

'A simple, homely welcome!' shouted the old man into his friend's ear as the train lurched and bellowed in.

'Aye, aye.'

The Sergeant's head was up like a pointer's, following the train along, going from door to door, from firebox to guard's van. The passengers dribbled out and went in a swirl through the cloak-room. The last doors were shutting.

'He must be . . . here!' wailed the old man in despair.

They looked at the dreary, empty face of the train as though expecting a miracle. Then they set off at a trot, first this way and then that, peering into windows, craning up their necks to the steaming panes. The Sergeant, on ahead, had flung open a door.

'Well done, Willie *bach!*' shouted the old man, clasping his hands fervently in relief, and drawing level with the carriage. There was nothing inside that he could see. And then as they looked, something moved stiffly on the rack and a hand reached out, waving them gently away.

The shock was too much for either of them. There followed one of those long silences with just a look and a nod and 'tch, tch, tch' which was meant to comprehend the whole of human frailty. They held him up between them, and then, as they loosened their grip, he did a slide quietly out of the perpendicular like a tree falling. His big black hat was tilted down over his eyes and he was trying to pierce this unwonted darkness that had descended on him. Then he gripped his umbrella like a sword and made one or two half-hearted steps with a leg sprung up under him, and then fell back on his support.

'He's not . . . drunk, William?' ventured the old man at last.

'Drunk! *Myn ufferni!* I wish I was as happy as he is.'

They made a detour down the side streets in the gathering dusk, with the lolling head between them, and somehow or other reached the safety of the manse.

'Into the kitchen,' whispered Mr. Davies in his urgency. His wife was at the hall putting the finishing touches to the decorations. Ap Towyn slumped into a basket chair and they tilted his legs up on to a footstool.

'Give him air.'

They flung open the kitchen door and took their places beside it like sentinels.

'How are you now?' the Sergeant bellowed into his ear. A long snore of placid content was the only answer.

'Plenty of time — a good three hours,' he called out at the old man's open-mouthed panic.

'William — this is not very much to my liking.' He shook his head sorrowfully. 'This is a temperance meeting and he is not . . . temperate, William,' he went on sadly.

'Well, I ask you. What *are* we going to do?' The Sergeant stared straight at the old minister in challenge.

'If I was quite sure of his repentance --'

'Huh — *myn ufferni*, I am: with a load on him like that.'

'He seems to have yielded to a sudden impulse: that is the only explanation. I suppose that a man *can* yield to a sudden impulse.'

'He's had a damn good try whuteffer!'

The Sergeant glared at the prostrate figure before him and nodded his head savagely. Then he clenched his fist and bent his arm, with the weight of wrath behind it.

'No more of it, though.'

And so they went on sitting there in the long vigil. After two hours of it the snore changed, like a barrel organ going on to another tune: not so slow and guttural. The breath that blew up his moustache in contented blasts had stopped also.

'We'd better wake him now.'

'A good twenty minutes to go — let him have his sleep out.'

The Sergeant snapped back the face of his watch with a gesture of triumph. And then, as he looked up again, had just time to catch the glare of a baleful eye on him before he began to yell: 'Watch out! Watch out!'

And before they quite knew what had happened, Ap Towyn had leapt like a goat over their crossed legs and was out through the door.

They rose slowly out of their chairs like men doing Swedish

exercises, mouths agape in horror. They could not even reproach one another, but stood there gibbering.

'Uffern dan! A sudden impulse, you say!'

And then, waving his arms wildly to the outside, the Sergeant began to run.

'Quick! After him!'

They worked by instinct, like hounds picking up a scent. But it was hard going. They drew covert after covert, but to no purpose. Never before had the inn counters, the taverns, the four ale bars, beheld the sight of the Reverend Joshua Davies hatless, eyes staring, holding whispered conferences with pot-men, barmaids, and casual hands.

'Just this very minute gone!' That was the answer they got to all their descriptions — at the Goat, the Barley Mow, the Bell, the Traveller's Rest, and goodness knows how many more.

On the stroke of eight they gave it up. They had been round every licensed house in the town. Sometimes they had been within a minute or two of their quarry: they would lose the scent and then pick it up again and then lose it again as he doubled back on his tracks.

And so two desolate men stood on the steps of the 'Town Hall, beaten, humiliated, overwhelmed with dread.

'Well, William?'

'Well, Mister Davies?'

'We must just hope for a . . . miracle.'

'Aye — a miracle!'

They could smell the blast of hot air coming down the stone steps. The hall was packed to the doors. A great burst of cheering greeted them. The crowd was getting restless. The green distemper walls were oozing, breath-laden. Right up to the galleries the people reached; they were putting chairs down the gangways. There was that sense of unreleased excitement, of fervour yet to come, that transcended the buzz. The Reverend Joshua took his place at the deal table and solemnly turned up the carafe of water and took a sip. Then he passed his hand wearily through his hair. He picked up the programme and ran his eyes listlessly through it.

And then what he dreaded came about. The hope raised by their appearance had died down. First there was a whistle, then a shuffle of feet in the gallery. The old man looked up to the cause of the commotion in a mute horror. Then came a concerted movement of feet and the dread chant, taken up:

‘We — want — Ap — Towyn.’

He raised his eyes under downcast brows, and saw his wife in the front row. She knew nothing of it all; perhaps it was as well. Next to her sat old Wmffre Dwyl, who was now in the workhouse; mouth open, dumbly staring, his toothless gums moving his hairy chaps up and down like a baboon’s. Old Wmffre was not quite sure what it was all about: had been brought there as a decoy duck, an example to the others on the promise of an ounce of shag. The old times had gone now, when he was good for his fourteen pints a day, when no keeper dared face him, drunk or sober. And to this hoary old man in his dotage the whole affair was like some coloured toy to a child, a moment’s un-understanding wonder in the dreariness of the life that had come down on him. Happy the man whose cares and trials were no more than his. Oh, happy the man!

‘WE — WANT — AP — TOWYN!’

Mr. Davies raised his head, hoping in a desperate hope to stem this breach in the dam of orderliness that threatened to overwhelm them.

‘Gentlemen! Gentlemen!’ he pleaded, raising his eyes aloft in piteous appeal. ‘Ap Towyn will be here . . . he will be here in a minute.’

He spoke out of a faint, a dread hope. But the promise, spreading from the front seats, went back like a wave over all the hall, causing a momentary hush.

And as though in answer to his promise there was a rumble on the stairs, then a confused clatter. The old minister, standing there, shut his eyes tightly.

‘Gentlemen!’ shouted the old man, retching up some triumph in the spaciousness of relief. ‘Ap Towyn . . . is HERE.’

He dared not turn his head. Instead he sat down out of weariness of spirit. He saw the great crowd of people rise to their feet,

waving, heard the round on round of cheers breaking like the sudden surge of the sea.

Ap Towyn had come; he saw; and now he was going to conquer. It was the breath of life to him. He plucked his hat off and sent it skimming to the back of the stage, raised his head with a fierce, inviolate arrogance, and then held a hand aloft, as though calling on the tumult to desist.

He took a step or two forward, none too steadily, lolloping over to the footlights, where the gas jets flickered in their wire cages.

Up went his hands again. He raised his head in exultation, his brow gleaming with the weight of his message.

'When in deliverance from this shell of corruption . . . the human heart lifts itself for that brief time allowed it — at such a time: what are words? What *are* words? What words, fashioned by man . . . can ever circumscribe the transports of the human spirit . . . the boundless, immeasurable ecstasy of the soul?

'None. NONE.

'The mind cannot fashion them . . . the tongue cannot utter them. A poor whisper to the heavens: a breath breathed into infinite space —'

'The old chairman's eyes widened. He raised his head in wonder. It was more than he had ever hoped for: the miracle was indeed happening. Out of the desolation in his heart a new hope rose. It was too early yet to be quite sure, but that was the way Ap Towyn started, slowly like the first imponderable rumblings of an avalanche. The old man cupped a hand to his ears and leaned forward.

'The spoken word: the speech: the discourse to the great assembly. Pshaw! And so out of this heart of joy . . . this heart of joy . . . I will SING.'

'No, no — please!' implored the old man, springing forward.

Ap Towyn shook himself free. There was to be no accompaniment to that song, for the harp that went with it had been silenced long ago. And as he began, in a ripe, resounding *basso profundo*, the audience gasped. They knew it, all right. At village fairs and shearings this old song continued to hold its own, like a sturdy old

reveller from a time past. It called up man's strength and, alas, his weakness in the face of that temptation that even Abraham knew.

Not this, not this, surely, the old man thought, making one desperate pluck at his coat-tails, fetching him back on his heels; and then on the rebound the great man went quietly over on his face. There was only the dull thud of his head on the boards, and the dust rising.

Mr. Davies surveyed the prostrate figure from the depths of his desolate heart. It was all over now. Before him was that strained hush that went before a storm. Anything might happen — the people who had come in long distances, the quarrymen from the hills, who would have to be up at five the next morning, had come to see . . . this!

He felt the sullen atmosphere, sullen like an overcast sky. There needed but a spark to send all this frustrate, pent-up frenzy into . . . what?

He bowed his head. His own humiliation was but a small thing beside it. He had played high and he had lost, hopelessly, irretrievably.

'Myn ufferni!'

It was old Wmffre's voice raised in exultation. There he was, eyes blinking like an old owl's coming alive to the light, head rising in jerks, nostrils wide, sniffing through the humid air. Then he bounded up out of his chair like a young buck.

Something in all this unreality was real enough for him.

Roar on roar of laughter went through the hall; people cheered and exhorted Wmffre in his desperate defiance of the stewards; stood up on chairs to get a better view. He had broken free again and made a last desperate rush to the platform edge, to where a yellow-gold bottle had rolled and was slowly gurgling. Then he got his hands under the trickle and rubbed them to his dried lips, lifted his old gnarled head in the joy of knowledge.

'Myn ufferni! WHISKY!'

Stained Glass

BY OLIVER GOSSMAN

(From *The Manchester Guardian*)

HE was standing up there, said the Widow Kidd, against the stained-glass window. His ten years didn't look seven, even with his new black clothes. The clothes were mourning for his mother, but they were stiff, bought by Aunt Curtis for wear as well. His mother you couldn't complain about; like Aunt Curtis, coldish, maybe, very correct about everything, beginning with herself. And the stained window was a woman in a blue gown with a white bodice, too low to my mind and some gold somewhere.

She carried cornflowers, she had fair hair, and a halo of sorts.

With the tea-tray in my hands I went through the other way. The tea and toast were for his aunt and his father in the dining-room. His father was a kind man, shy, now too perplexed in his grief to think about anything but his duty. It was a job, I make no doubt, to keep warding off Miss Curtis. A retired naval officer, with a medal for something; the kind of man that might fight an eagle but can't say boo to a goose.

When I came out with my empty tray, said the Widow Kidd, that boy was coming down. Out of seven steps he was making ten. The sun had come out. It was blazing through the window behind him. Its beams were right on the red carpet at his feet. He was afraid to step on them, he was afraid of the shadow as well.

There, in our hall, was my kitchen door, the store-room door, other doors, the oak hallstand with its tray for cards, and there was your front door, with another woman on it, but ground glass, no colour, like a ghost. At the stair-foot was the big grandfather clock. You could hear the voices from the dining-room, most the voice of Miss Curtis. On that thick carpet you couldn't hear the boy at all. He made his way downstairs, step by step, afraid of

the shadow, afraid of the light, as if each step were a step in the long life before him. A mouse could not have heard me. I stood still, spellbound by that boy and that window. There was nothing so loud in that hall as the loud ticking of that clock.

It was older than any of us, that clock; as old, I make bold to say, as Father Time himself. It had pictures varnished on the face of it, a Highlander in one corner, in another a boy on his way to a school that looked more like a prison. The clock was always set half an hour fast, for punctuality's sake, and as time went on we got so used to that clock and that clock got so used to us, said the Widow Kidd, when it struck the half we knew it was only the hour, and when it got down to that long, solemn churchyard noise we said to ourselves, without so much as working it out, at our work, wherever we were: 'There goes the half-hour.' That's Father Time for you and his fatherly ways.

Now the boy was still moving downstairs towards me. It was just on half-past five — six by our clock. The sun was stronger than ever through that coloured window, what with the storm behind the sun, and you couldn't tell which was strongest — the window, the angry sun, or the bo^ding storm. The boy's foot was small on that thick carpet. His hand was far too small for the broad elm banister. What with the boy in black, and the window, and our sun, and the storm that was coming, I was under a spell.

Aunt Curtis, continued the Widow Kidd, I could see sitting in the dining-room in there, making up her mind afresh. For me there was only the ticking of that great clock, the stained-glass window, and that bit tadpole of a boy between them. All the time I was wondering how to put my tray down without making a clatter.

Before that clock spoke out it cleared its throat, it hummed and hawed, it coughed, it whirred, it whizzed and wheezed. Only then it struck One. It whirred again quickly and struck Two. It wheezed and whirred a longer space and struck Three, and with an unholy tumult of springs and things it got out Four. Still it whizzed, it sighed, then louder, with that bass boom that any time of day was a whole midnight in itself, Five!

My boy, his feet on the red carpet, the window behind him casting at once its own gaudy light and his own lonely shadow on the last two steps, simply stood agape. I was all aghast myself. To my eyes, filling up as they were, the face of the clock twisted up in an agony of its own. It never struck six.

There was no sound now in the whole house, not even the ticking of the clock. The clock was as straight up and down on its dignity as those figures you see flat on a tomb in an abbey.

The boy started to run. I was out at once. He put his face in my apron. He was not crying yet; he only kept calling out, 'The clock is dead!'

But the dining-room door opened, and Miss Curtis bustled out. Her name was no better than Susan, like my own, but, being single and with so much money, she was the whole family on her side, and everybody called her Aunt Curtis. She took in the situation with one of her glances, and there was mighty little left of the situation.

'You've been talking to him, you silly Susan,' she said. 'You ought to have more sense. We can't have any noise here.'

Though my poor boy was crying pretty fast now, I said, peppery enough: 'There will be no noise, ma'am. He will be all right with a piece of cake in my kitchen.'

Room Wanted

BY G. F. GREEN

(From *Horizon*)

In these same streets you shall wander,
and in the same purlieus you shall roam . . .
There is no ship to take you to other lands, there is no road.
You have so shattered your life here, in this small corner
that in all the world you have ruined it.

THE afternoon was warm, where the peonies pressed large against palings sheltering the brick row fronts; and warm as breath in the narrow street. Thomas Clarke's shoes trod slowly the marred macadam, as if formed of the same material. Under a hazy middle distance of factories, an old man raked soil round his new green privet, which soon would smell. Clarke attended to all this, whilst he wanted merely a room. He was a spare young man, in a city suit, his worn pin-spot tie tight in his neat collar. A cheap rainproof damped his arm and his fingers ached stiffly at his laden suitcase. His hat was pushed from scant hair, his eyes steady or kind, but his face pale for want of sun or interest or action. As he glanced at the street sides, his mouth and hands were brief, as if the day strained his nerves.

He noticed the card, FURNISHED ROOM TO LET, turning through the gap in the fence. He put down his suitcase and rapped. The door opened on an old decrepit woman, heavy in black worsted. Her smeared eyes stared, as if unaware of him or the sunny street, while by greyish strands of hair, her lower lip hung crumbled like bread. She breathed rhythmically as a clock. He saw her thick rucked stockings, her cracked shoes trodden at the ankles. He followed her into the hall, darkened suddenly as the door shut. A smell, stale though antiseptic, of his boyhood's Sunday School or, since, of a cheap woman's bedroom, of secretive loathed work,

mauled his face. He followed her up the close linoed stairs. She paused often for breath, but her fat hand on the banister dragged her on. They reached the top landing where she unlocked and pushed open a door.

'This is the room,' she said.

She entered as if she inhabited this, as also the other rooms, her hand, dirt in its cracked nails, aiding her on the brass and black-railed double bed, where a wool counterpane lay. She drew back soiled lace curtains from the french window. Dim light showed faded brown walls, the texts and pictures, the mirror above bric-à-brac on the draped mantelpiece. It fell as in the room of someone dead, yet but for them it was empty. She turned and watched him easing his hurt hand.

'How much do you want?' he said.

'Fifteen. It's what I've had up to now.'

'All right, I'll take it.'

She moved across the threadbare carpet, whilst the room seemed airless, as if already he was alone.

'Wait.'

He wished to talk to her, to make the most of his few instructions.

'There's a lady — a girl — coming to see me. Will you show her up? Her name's Ellen — Miss Ellen Reid.'

'Who'll she ask for?'

'Mr. Clarke,' he said. 'Thomas Clarke.'

He watched her hand seek the banister, going slowly down the tall stair-well; then he shut the door on himself in the room. He saw the brown walls, the text at the bed-head, JESUS GUARD THY SLEEP, and the dull red carpet arm-chair, empty by the window. His hand traced the knitted counterpane, knowing the craving to touch and alter, to shift the derelict time away, waiting in an unoccupied room. He raised his suitcase on to the bed, nervously unpacking it. His familiar possessions, the shirts worn day to day, the broken hairbrush, the slippers, weighted his loneliness like mimicry. He put them in drawers, on the washstand, then turned toward the shut window. A fire escape gripped the grey-walled

well, its iron perforated platform level with him. He watched it as if its dead lack of interest could make him one with it and cure him, whilst, beyond, the smoky evening light crept on the slate roofs. A rap like a shot of dope in his limbs jerked him round.

In the open door, a girl in a white frock, slight blue coat, and no stockings came where the dark-armed woman shut the door.

‘Come in,’ he said.

Ellen lightly entered, a child — he remembered she was fifteen — laying her coat on the bed. Her lank limbs were bare, her throat, her face to her fair hair, cooler amidst the worn heavy room that scarcely held her, as a child, strayed into a cave, retains the daylight in its hands and eyes. She seemed to hold torn flowers from the fields. Her small alive gestures brought him to earlier days, breathing the cold air of a gully, where rowan dashed red drops to the falls, his wrists and face chilled with its secret, singing force. Watching her, he had to imagine her in that room, so far was the time and place they should have met in.

‘Sit down,’ he said.

She sat in the arm-chair, her lithe arms on the pattern, where light fell from the shut window. He stared at her, whilst the room grew closer.

‘You had a good journey?’ he said. ‘Did you see Travers as I told you?’

‘Yes, I saw him.’

‘When she died, your mother told Travers you were to see him, if I was away; or if I couldn’t help you. Did he tell you? Was the journey all right from Newbridge?’

‘Yes, it took about two hours.’

‘Not long.’

He turned, pacing the thin carpet, where the airless room made the unseen dust warm, as if they were huddled in a den. He gazed at the dark, gilt-framed oil painting beyond the bed.

‘Did you read,’ he said, ‘or look out of the window on the journey?’

‘I read a bit.’

‘What?’

He stared at the picture's brown ochre, in its hard rich gold, echoed by the brass bed knob.

'It was about a wreck in Cornwall and two fishermen go in a cave and get trapped.'

He was forced to look at her.

'Was it good?'

'Yes, I liked it.'

The brown walls were like felt to the closed window. He saw the slight child, her tilt of nose and cheek, whilst the things of the room formed his words. He sweated with the need to flee.

'Have you your money on you?' he said.

'Yes.'

He saw her eyes startle, the two curls dropped on her brow.

'Give it to me.'

She sought in the low neck of her frock. The air crammed arid where a round sea view in crimson plush frame obsessed him. He leaned near her. His fingers almost touched hers on the notes, as if he would tear them, but her hand fell. He held the money, then threw it on the bed.

'What books do you read?' he said.

He grasped the rough chair back round her frail body.

'I don't know.'

'Idiot,' he said quietly. 'What have you read?'

The room stifled him, where he saw her for an instant, a scared child amongst it.

'What do you read?' he said. 'Did you pass Craner's Iron Works in the train from Newbridge? Tell me.'

She cringed frightened against the chair. He turned, his face drawn as if in pain, grasping the bed rods. He stared straight, but felt past his shoulder her hurt form like a wounded bird. His eyes fixed as through murk, on a parchment hair-tidy, its dry faded hair spilling through its torn sides. He clenched the smooth rail.

'Go from here,' he said. 'Do you hear, Ellen?'

She left the chair, picking up her coat and money from the bed.

'Get lodgings,' he said, 'and let me know. We haven't talked yet. We've arranged nothing.'

The door shut, leaving him in the hot silence. He leapt forward, unlocked and flung open the window. Grey light fell on the roofs and the untenanted zigzag of the fire escape. He stared blankly as if he saw these things outside for the first time. Then he sank against the curtains, crushed to his face like a child's lace handkerchief, where he breathed the cold air.

He reached toward the next night a fishing inn on a long lake, narrow between the dark green shouldered fells. He left his suitcase, and tired from his journey walked to the lake's edge. The evening was solitary, cold and clear as a bell, while grey water at his feet lapped the sleek stones, and near a fence a sheep cropped the reedy grass. Its sound spread from him through the dale, as if he were a stone flung in the still air. He stood and heard, and watched the hills, no more thinking. The swollen crash of a burn reached his mind, as if this were a huge mill where the slightest noise took aeons of time, the thin, remote breath of peat-logged marsh its only other product. Darkening, the senseless element possessed him, a tyrant releasing his limbs and mind to bondage. At the far end of the lake he saw a boat rowed under the fell's shade. He shivered, his face nervously set, as if someone trod his grave, then turned to the hotel.

In the well-aired bedroom he took off his shirt, and washed from the blue-flowered jug and bowl. The water struck cold to his hands and face. Wind from the fells stirred the fresh lace curtains, breathed on his bared back, to the clean fawn walls, where light failed as on the lake. He dried his fingers, pacing the carpet, as if to check time against a sure, feared yet needed assignation. As he tied his tie, he saw by the dim mirror, reflecting the brass and black railed bed, the round, red-plush framed sea view, so that his throat and hands halted in drear anxiety. He felt the closer air, backing from the dusty, littered mantelpiece, till his fingers held the bed rails. The brown walls, nearing him, narrowed his guts and mind, like a presence. His eyes stared through dusk at the increasingly familiar things with hatred and desire. The arid air throbbed in his throat as if he spoke. He swung, as if he already acted, and saw the carpet arm-chair before the grey, unstirred lace curtains, empty.

Horror damped through him like cloth, whilst he drew from the bed, alone across the room, and fled.

Wherever he went, the solid hotel, slum, seaside apartment, the room after his first new relief closed on him. As he washed or lay in bed, he saw the text, the bric-à-brac, breathing the darker air. He was forced to act, yet amongst its familiar things, his eyes and hands found no one. The crowding absence tortured his limbs, his ignorant desperate mind, exhausting his strength. Intangible, he could not resist the lack of presence, which corrupted him each night in the dreadful *fetid* room, as decay must control his body. He knew only his weak hands on the bed rods, the suitcase handle, as haunted by this evil he fled. As weeks became months where he existed in impotent flight or search, he appeared ageless, his youth shrunk beyond its roots, as through deathly winter.

One evening he came down a damp street till he saw the card FURNISHED ROOM TO LET. He turned through the fence's gap across its rank garden and, dropping his suitcase, knocked. An old woman let him in, leading up close linoed stairs to the dark landing.

'This is the room,' she said.

He entered the known room whilst the door closed. He saw the mantelpiece, the patterned carpet, the shut french windows. He inhabited there as a lifetime's hated home, feeling no longer strength nor desire to go. He lay defeated, by the brass and black rungs, the room absorbing him, his frayed suit, his inert arms and legs. It shaded his ashen face, his thin mute line of mouth, watching dusk fall on the fire escape through the soiled lace. He breathed rapidly, his fingers crooked in the bedspread, when a knock *tensed* his brain. He leapt facing the door, as Ellen came, driving him in terror to the draped mantelpiece. Her limbs were naked, her child's astonished face, undefended to her bare hands. The room surrounded her like fog, caging her fresh voice.

'Tom, where have you —'

He backed to the carpet arm-chair. Her fair frail head passed the litter, the brown walls, whilst the air dried as he crouched, staring at her. Her small throat paused by the hair-tidy's split dead hair,

and she smiled. He could touch her. His face taut with decision, he grasped the chair.

'Get out!' he screamed.

Silence held his voice. He threw back the window as if to leap, but chill air struck him. He fainted on the iron platform. The wind touched his face, calm-featured like a youth's asleep. It stirred the light curtains in the clean, empty room.

Time Wasted?

BY LESLIE HALWARD

(From *The Listener*)

WIN and Charl had quarrelled about where they should go on Easter Monday. Charl, as usual, wanted to get up about ten o'clock; wash, shave and dress leisurely; wander across the street to the Unicorn and have a couple of drinks; wander back to dinner; spend the afternoon playing snooker at the Working Men's Club; have some tea; meet Win about half-past five and take her to the pictures; go from there to the fair; and finish up with the sing-song that always took place that night in the Rose and Crown. He had done that every Easter Monday for years, for the past three years, having Win as his companion during the evening instead of any girl he happened to take a fancy to. That was his way of spending that day. It was a *good* way. He couldn't think why Win should want to alter it.

But Win had said very definitely that this year she didn't want to go to the pictures, nor to the fair, nor to the Rose and Crown. She wanted to do something different. Charl was surprised and more than a little puzzled, but at first quite willing to be patient and understanding about the business. He knew from experience that women were sometimes awkward. You had to humour them. What, then, he asked her, did she fancy she'd like to do?

'I'd like to have a day in the country,' Win said.

'A *day* in the *country*?' Charl would not have sounded more astonished if she had said she had an inclination to hang herself.

'When I was a little girl,' Win said, 'our mom took me to a place called Mornbey. It's only about twenty miles from here. I want to go there again.'

Charl was thinking rapidly. Twenty miles away. An hour or so to get there. A look round the place. An hour or so to come

back. Start soon after an early dinner and they'd be home in plenty of time to go to the fair and afterwards to the sing-song at the Rose and Crown. It would mean having to give up his snooker and the pictures, but he supposed that wouldn't matter for once.

'How'd you get there?' he asked.

'By train. I've looked them up,' Win said quickly, already excited. 'There's one leaves here at 10.05 and the last one back starts at 9.08. We should be there a whole day!'

'Ain't there any more trains than that?' Charl asked, in alarm. 'I mean, so's we could start out about dinner-time and get back — well, say just after tea?'

'What's the good of that?' Win wanted to know. 'What's the good of going there at all if you're going to rush straight back? No,' she said, dreamily, 'I want to stop there all day. I want to walk over the fields and picnic, and in the afternoon have some tea at a little cottage. I want to —'

'How about if it's wet?' Charl interrupted, and rolled his tongue in his cheek.

'We shan't be able to go if it's wet.'

Charl hoped it would be wet.

'Supposing it starts to rain after we get there?'

'We shall have to come back, that's all.'

Charl hoped it would start to rain as soon as they got there.

But supposing it was fine when they started and kept fine all day? A whole day in the country! Nothing to do for hours and hours but wander about . . . Nothing to see . . . The very thought of that was too much for Charl.

'No,' he said.

'What do you mean, no?' Win asked.

He shook his head. 'I ain't wearing that.'

'Oh, Charl!'

'An hour or two, p'raps, but not all perishin' day!'

'Oh, *Charl!*'

'No,' he said.

'I — think you're mean.' There were tears in the girl's eyes and her lower lip began to tremble.

'All right, then, I'm mean,' he said, stubbornly.

'Oh, Charl!' she said.

'For the love of Mike don't keep saying "Oh, Charl!" like a flamin' old hen!' he burst out.

'Well,' Win said, 'you *never* ask me what *I'd* like to do. We've *always* done just what *you* wanted to do, and I've never said a word till now.'

He didn't say anything to that.

'It's the very first time I've *ever* asked you to take me anywhere,' Win hurried on, 'and now —' Quite unable to keep the tears in check any longer, she let them flow.

Charl saw the tears by the light of the street lamp at the bottom of the entry in which they stood. He didn't mind a quarrel — they'd quarrelled many a time before — but when she started to cry. . . .

'Look here,' he said, hastily, 'if you want to go all *that* bad —'

'I do,' Win said, and sniffed.

'Don't cry no more,' Charl urged her.

She sniffed again, dabbed her eyes with a tiny handkerchief, and said: 'I'd love to go. Really I would. I've often thought about that time our mom took me. Oh, I can't tell you how nice it was! Everything that clean and fresh . . . And the smells . . . I've never forgot it. I should *love* to go there again!'

'All right,' Charl said. 'If it's fine —'

'Oh, Charl!' she cried, flinging her arms round his neck.

But it didn't rain at all. On Easter Monday morning it looked as if the whole world were drenched in sunshine.

'It's going to be a glorious day,' Win told him happily, as they walked together to the station.

She didn't notice the joyless tone in which he reluctantly agreed.

'Stiffen the crows!' he thought gloomily, as he settled himself in a corner seat in the carriage. 'Ten bloomin' hours in the wilderness! What a Bank Holiday!' He thought of what he might be doing if he'd stayed at home. . . .

But Charl was by nature a cheerful individual and couldn't if he tried remain dismal for long. Among his own friends he was

considered something of a wag. At any time when two or three of them were gathered together Charl could be relied upon to raise a few laughs. And within ten minutes of beginning the journey the other passengers were smiling and occasionally chuckling at Charl's more flippant remarks. Win laughed excessively at almost everything he said.

'Here it is!' she cried, as the train began to slow down in Mornbey and Perlow station. Jumping out of the carriage, she said: 'I was only *ever* so little when our mom brought me here, but I should have known it again! Isn't it quaint?'

'I never seen anything like it,' Charl said truthfully. To the tired-looking porter who took their tickets he said something about there being a rush to-day — they were the only passengers to alight from the train — and then allowed Win to take his arm and eagerly lead him out of the station on to the white dusty road. Mornbey village they reached after about ten minutes' walk.

'Is this all there is of it?' Charl asked, when they had walked down the single deserted street and he had glanced at the two rows of cottages, catching a glimpse of curious occupants peeping from lace-curtained windows; at the general stores; the tiny pub; and, at the far end, standing solid and aloof, the ancient church.

Win laughed. 'You're in the country now, you know.'

'You're telling me!' he said. 'What d'you reckon we're going to do with ourselves?'

'Walk,' she said, 'and find somewhere nice to eat our sandwiches. We won't keep to the road. We'll take the first path we come to that leads over some fields. It don't matter where it brings us out. We've got all day.'

Charl said hopefully, looking towards the pub: 'Er — how about wetting our whistles afore we start?'

'You don't want one yet, do you?' Win asked.

'It might be a good while afore we see another pub,' Charl said, as if pubs were oases and they were about to cross a desert.

'Well, you go and have one. I'll wait.'

'Tell you what,' he volunteered. 'I'll go and get a bottle to swill the sangers down. Shan't be half a tick.'

'All right,' Win said.

He hurried off in the direction of the pub and returned in a few minutes with a bottle of beer in his jacket pocket.

'They don't speak the same language as me,' he said, grinning. 'The gaffer thought I wanted to hire a horse and cart.'

'Oh, you are a fool!' she said, with a laugh. 'You'll go and get us locked up or something.'

'I had to make signs like a deaf and dumb bloke to get this,' he said, tapping the neck of the bottle. 'Well, we're all set for hitting the trail. Lead on, MacDougall!'

They started off. Soon the village had disappeared beyond a bend in the road and not a building of any sort was in sight. They might have been hundreds of miles from anywhere. Win strode along vigorously, the light breeze that had sprung up blowing through her uncovered short fair hair. She kept taking deep breaths through her nose, lifting her head and drawing the clear air down into her lungs.

'What's up with you?' Charl inquired. 'You sound like a kettle boiling.'

'I don't care what I sound like,' the girl said. She drew another breath, 'Mmmmm! It's grand!'

'Sooner have a niff of a plate of nice hot fish and chips, myself,' Charl said.

'Oh, you!' the girl said sharply. 'That's all you can think about, your stomach!'

He pulled a face, turned up the collar of his jacket, said, 'Gone cold, ain't it?' and then kept silent for a time.

Presently they saw a stile, and at Win's suggestion climbed over it and began to walk across a meadow towards a wood. In spite of the breeze, they were both hot, and the shade of the wood as they entered it cooled them like a shower. The air was shrill with the song of birds. Almost at their feet a rabbit darted across the path and vanished into the undergrowth, causing Win to cry delightedly: 'Look! Oh, wasn't he lovely?'

'Look better in a saucepan with some suet dumplings,' Charl said. 'I ought to have brought my popgun along.'

Again, just for an instant, a look of annoyance hardened the girl's face, but she did not say anything, only gave an almost inaudible click of her tongue.

Coming out of the wood, the strong sunlight making them frown and screw up their eyes, they found themselves on the edge of another meadow that sloped down to a valley where a river flowed. Beyond the river the land rose again, field after field patterned with sunshine and shadow, the pattern ever moving, ever changing as the changing clouds moved overhead, rose gently, fell away, and rose once more to a distant range of hills. The girl stood stock still at the sight, her hands clasped together before her, unable to speak.

Charl, who was wandering ahead, amusing himself by knocking the heads off flowers with a stick he had picked up, all at once missed her. Turning, he asked: 'What're you looking at?'

'Oh, isn't it marvellous?' Win said.

'What?'

'The view, of course! I've never seen anything like it in all my life!'

'Oh,' Charl said. His stick swished through the air and another flower head flew off.

'Oh, *don't* keep doing that!' the girl cried furiously. It seemed as if he were deliberately trying to spoil everything for her.

'Eh?' Charl asked, startled by the tone of her voice.

'What do you want to keep on killing them flowers for?' Win said, petulant now rather than angry.

'I ain't hurting *you*, am I?' he countered, bristling. 'Got 'em a bit, ain't you?' He threw the stick away, savagely. 'I'm fed up on this,' he announced bluntly.

'Oh, Charl!' she began.

'Don't start that "Oh, Charl!" business again,' he warned her.

'I'm sorry, Charl,' she said. 'I didn't mean to shout at you. Really I didn't. Only when you said —'

'When I said what? What have I said now as I shouldn't? Eh?'

'Oh, nothing,' she said. 'It don't matter.'

'I should think you got out of bed the wrong side this morning,' Charl said.

'That isn't fair!' Win cried. 'You know it isn't. I was as happy as anything till —'

'Till we got to this God-forsaken hole,' he put in. 'Then you started being crabby. Nothing I've done or said's been right for you. I didn't want to come in the first place.'

'That's right,' she said, her anger rising again. 'It's *me* who's dragged you here. It's *my* fault, all of it. *You* haven't done nothing at all!'

'Don't talk wet,' Charl said.

'Oh, Charl,' she said, 'I really was enjoying myself ever so much till you —'

'But what have I *done*? What have I *said*?' He simply did not know what speech or action of his could have made her unhappy. 'You wanted to come here, didn't you? And you've come, ain't you? And *now* you ain't satisfied. But I don't see why you should blame it on to me.'

. It was no use. They could go on arguing all day. He would never understand.

'I should think we'd better have our sandwiches and — and then go home,' she said.

'I don't trouble what we do as long as you're a bit cheerful about it,' he said.

She did not say any more. They sat down where they were and ate the sandwiches. Charl drank the bottle of beer, Win refusing when he offered her some. In silence, both miserable, they went back through the wood, across the meadow, and gained the road. Arriving at the station, they learned that they had to wait nearly an hour for a train. It was then a few minutes to three.

In order to kill time, they wandered back to the village, and in an effort to cheer Win, Charl bought her some bars of chocolate from the stores. She did not eat them. Entering the station again, they walked up and down the platform until, at long last, the train came in.

They had a carriage to themselves. They sat opposite each other and for the first quarter of an hour neither spoke. Then, so suddenly and in so loud a voice that the girl jumped, Charl said:

'I wish to God you'd put a different face on! You look as if you're just going to a funeral.'

She said nothing.

'Look here,' he said. 'Your day in the country's been a washout, but that's no reason why we should lie down and die, is it? We'll make up for lost time to-night,' he promised her. 'We shall be home soon after half-past five.'

'The pictures, of course,' she thought, without enthusiasm. 'And then the fair. And then the Rose and Crown.'

'Gracie Fields is on at the Gaumont,' he told her. 'They say it's her best picture. I bet you'll enjoy it.'

She did. Gracie made her laugh, made her feel sad, and then made her laugh again until her sides ached with laughing. She enjoyed herself at the fair, too. Charl was on the top of his form, and by ten o'clock he had won for her a doll, a vase (for her bottom drawer), two coco-nuts, and a feather tickler. In the Rose and Crown, the prizes proudly displayed on the table in front of her, Win had a couple of ports that made her feel deliciously drowsy, giggled a good deal, and listened to Charl bawling popular choruses at the top of his voice.

After closing time Charl took her home. In the entry he made rather violent love to her and asked if she had enjoyed herself. She said she had. She said she was sorry she'd spoilt his day for him and he said she hadn't. They'd made up for the time they'd wasted as he'd promised they should. She wasn't to think about it any more, but little Charl knew what she wanted better than she knew herself, didn't he? She said he did.

At half-past eleven they parted, after arranging to meet again the following night. Charl went up the street whistling. Win went into the house and in five minutes was lying in bed. She was very sleepy, but she lay awake for some time thinking over all that had happened during the day. And quite suddenly, for no particular reason, she began to weep as if her heart were breaking.

The Fair

BY EDGAR HOWARD

(From *The Welsh Review*)

A MIDDLE-AGED showman, with a quick, brown face and a bowler tilted back over his forehead, spoke an unending stream of words into a microphone which he held in his left hand. A few feet above his head, a gigantic amplifier repeated his words to a still and semi-hypnotized circle.

'Threepence,' it shouted, 'threepence only for the Show of Shows . . . it's new, it's different, it's stew-pendous . . . the most sen-sational act ever presented by a touring company, straight from the Continent . . . threepence only! Ladies and Gentlemen, kindly step up to the box, the show is about to commence, step right up, sir, step right up . . . now don't hesitate, come right up, lady over there, yes madam, step right up. . . '

The lady over there, a dark-haired woman with waxen cheeks, giggled and turned to a man who stood by her side. 'C'mon, Simon,' she whispered coaxingly, 'le's go in.'

Simon adjusted his peaked cap until it shaded his face, put his hands on the woman's shoulders, and guided her through the crowd. As they moved up to the turnstiles, more than one noticed that they looked older than the other couples. They seemed so staid and sober that they had the appearance of married people rather than a pair of lovers.

They did not press down to the front like the rest, but lingered behind as if they had seen the show before and had not the strength to stay away. Naphtha flares, which had been stuck at intervals on the tent poles, spurted out a bluish-white radiance that neutralized colour. Ellen watched the nearest jet. Its incandescence ebbed and flowed in a curious gurgling sound. She was about to point it out to Simon, when he chanced to lift his head. The words died

on her lips as she watched the light flicker whitely across his strong, wind-tanned face and dull the redness of his hair.

'Your hair looks golden,' she remarked lightly, 'it's almost platinum blond.'

'All right,' he muttered, without looking at her. 'You needn't rub it in.'

The woman smiled fleetingly. So he was as sensitive as ever about his hair. Poor Simon. How they used to tease him when they were children! 'Look,' one would cry, 'Ginger's 'ad 'is 'air cut.' Writhing inwardly, Simon would force a smile and pretend an indifference he was far from feeling. Sometimes, he wondered with a gnawing hurt if he could change the colour of his hair. Once, he asked his mother and she was so hurt that he was sent to bed without supper. He still remembered that, just as he remembered his first school day. It was Ellen who took charge of him, for his mother was tied to the farm. Besides, Ellen was a good two years older and knew the ropes.

And so they wandered hand in hand through their childhood, sometimes sharing and then quarrelling over those treasures which are so precious to the soul of a child, birds' eggs, bits of coloured glass, pencil stubs, broken bangles, and, when the season came, conkers. Conkers remained Simon's favourite game until he noticed that Ellen flinched whenever her conker was broken.

And then, one merry night in September, when Simon was bending over his birthday cake and blowing out its nine candles one by one, something happened which was to change the entire course of their lives.

A new tenant rented a farm adjoining Simon's home. He was strong and broad-shouldered, and he always looked so pleasant and businesslike that folk took to him easily. He had one son, a lithe and sturdy stripling, with a dark face and even darker eyes. Jack, who was very generous, soon made a friend of Simon and the two lads started walking home together. They would linger on the roadside and swing on farm gates until Ellen got a good start on them. Simon rarely spoke to her now except to acknowledge a greeting, and the girl watched the progress of his new friendship

with a dull ache in her heart. Sometimes she would notice them roam the fields together, snaring rabbits or shooting birds with Jack's air rifle, and a feeling of mad jealousy would overwhelm her.

All this was a blur in the woman's mind, but one incident stood out with especial clarity. It happened in the conker season. Simon, after an unusually diligent search, succeeded in discovering a conker that proved hard enough to withstand all the attacks of its challengers. After a fortnight, Simon's eleven inches of string and the battle-scarred lump that swung at its knotted end became an object of envy for every lad in the parish.

One cold October evening, Jack threaded a ripe and massive conker and challenged Simon to a duel.

'O.K.,' Simon replied disdainfully; 'my shot first.'

Taking careful aim, he struck Jack's conker a hard, calculated blow. 'Is it cracked?' he cried gleefully.

'No,' Jack denied fiercely, 'it isn't . . . you just put up your conker and I'll smash it to smithereens.'

As Simon strained to keep his conker motionless, Ellen walked up quite casually and brought down her hand sharply.

There was a loud crack. Simon's conker lay shattered into bits. For a few moments the boy's eyes opened wide with incredulous astonishment, then the pupils narrowed. Ellen, watching him warily, knew he was looking at her conker. Its hard, red covering had been opened by the force of its own blow, exposing its interior. Hanging there, for everybody to see, was a small square stone, with the string looped about its middle. Ellen's ruse was exposed. She had sliced the skin down one side, uncured the conker, and, after rounding the crack by the pressure of her fingers, had skillfully inserted the stone into the hollow. When the pressure was relaxed the conker looked just as before.

Simon slowly clenched his fists while the blood poured into his cheeks and flooded even his neck with colour. For an instant his mortification stung him so bitterly that tears burst out of his eyes; then, his rage mastering him completely, he flung himself on the girl.

His onslaught drove her into the hedge, where she cowered, whimpering, while he drummed her back with all his might.

'Don't,' she screamed, 'don't! I'll tell Miss Roberts . . . oh, don't!' as Simon seized her homespun beret, spitting on its white wool, and threw it over the hedge.

'Havia 'ad enough?' he asked scornfully, sitting on her back and plucking her hair. His first wave of rage spent, he gave rein to his instinct for cruelty, pinching her legs and arms.

'I'll tell my mother,' Ellen sobbed, squirming with fear and forcing her body into the contour of the hedge-side, 'an' I'll tell Miss Roberts too, and then you'll get a cane.'

For answer, Simon lifted his fists and let their weight fall one after another on the small of her back.

'Oh, Jack,' Ellen begged in final desperation, 'stop him . . . please stop him.'

'I can't,' Jack said to please Simon, but he seized his arm, adding, 'C'mon Simon, she isn't worth it.'

'All right,' said Simon, giving the girl a final blow. 'Gerr up,' he ordered sharply, and 'be quick about it.'

He half rose as Ellen turned her head. Her face looked dirty with crying and her mouth was quivering uncontrollably. Before she could utter a sound, Simon struck her between the lips with all his force.

Ellen fell back, screaming, 'Oh, my mouth, my mouth, oh it's bleeding, it's bleeding.' She leaped up madly and ran to the opposite hedgerow, where she lay cowering.

Jack, who was frightened, shouted, 'Use your handkerchief.'

'I can't,' the girl gasped. 'I've left it in school.' She huddled herself over the road, crying and trembling. Drops of blood fell on the ground.

The boys stood still, watching her. Simon's mouth was hard but his face was white. Jack rolled up his conker, which had been dangling in his hand, and put it in his pocket. He watched Ellen jab at her mouth with her calico skirt, then he said suddenly, 'I'll get your beret for you.' He followed the road until he discovered a gate. He started to climb it.

'Come down,' Simon ordered, following him, 'and let 'er fetch it 'erself.'

'Why?'

'Cos I'm telling you, see. That's enough reason for you.' Angrily, Simon seized the other's leg and started pinching it. Jack tensed himself. A spasm of rage ran through him and he kicked out uncontrollably. His boot met Simon straight on the mouth. There was a clink of metal on bone, as Simon staggered into the road, screaming with pain.

His heart beating with sudden fright, Jack sprang down and placed his hands on Simon's shoulders.

'Lift your head up,' he begged, 'le's see . . . lift your head up, Simon.'

But Simon, who cried all the way home, refused to be comforted. Jack walked by his side, watching him in silent misery. Neither spared a thought for the girl, as she paced the field looking for her white beret.

Ellen did not walk with them again until Jack started courting her. That was years later, when Jack was managing his father's farm and Simon was making a success of the milk trade. Simon was the better business man of the two, but he was the loser in the game of love. Both had in their turns made advances to Ellen, who skilfully managed to play one against the other until the news leaked out that she was engaged to Jack Owen.

After this, Simon focused his attention on the business; but there was one pleasure he could not forgo — the warm, smelly atmosphere of a fair. While he toiled, adding coin to coin until his pennies turned into silver and then more slowly into gold, he looked forward to the night of the great spring carnival. When it came, he counted out a handful of silver and decided to have a spree.

And so it took place that he was squirting a water-teaser at a couple of girls, when he found himself face to face with Ellen.

'Hello,' he said, a little awkwardly, 'what are you doing here?'

'Enjoying myself,' she replied, grinning up at him. He noticed that her face looked very pale. Perhaps it was due to the naphtha flares.

'Where's Jack?' he asked her, point blank.

'I don't know.' She shrugged her eyebrows. 'I don't mind, either,' she continued with sudden candour, placing her hand in his, 'I'd rather walk with you to-night, Simon.'

A flash, like fire, went through the man, stirring him to heat. I must be careful, he thought, as he followed Ellen towards the glittering roundabouts. But as they went swirling round on two swans, the deep, staccato rhythm of an organ swelled about their ears, tossing their blood into fever.

When they tired of the roundabouts, they followed the crowd until Ellen fell for the wiles of the keen, brown-faced showman, who cajoled the lady in black and her escort into his sensational and never-to-be-forgotten side show.

As Ellen watched the gurgling naphtha flare flicker across Simon's cheeks she wondered what his thoughts were. She pressed against him until she felt the warmth of his body. After a while he put his arm around her waist and began to whisper foolish things in her ear.

Ellen smiled fleetingly as she listened to the rise and flow of his voice. Every now and then he turned and his hot breath tickled her throat. Once she giggled nervously and he squeezed her to him with a grip like a vice.

'Stop it, Simon,' she whispered. 'Stop it, you're hurting me!' She struggled quietly, her mouth twisted with pain. With an effort she seized his arm and wrenched it away. It fell limp by his side. She stood, breathing heavily, moving her weight from leg to leg.

Neither spoke again until the show was over. As they passed out Simon asked indifferently, 'Where shall we go?'

'With the crowd,' Ellen suggested, pulling her white beret down to her ears. Simon followed her unresistingly and the two figures drifted out of focus into the wild, surging mass which moved back and fore like a herd in a cowpen. Subordinated to its impulses, they meandered from stall to stall, buying coloured hats, rose-water squirts, brown sticks of rock, and silver trinkets in which they delighted like children on a school trip.

Twice it rained but they kept on moving, conscious only of the

warm, happy fluidity of contact, the blinding incandescence of the flares, the shouts and screams that were at one moment individual and then disembodied, and the great shaking rhythm of the roundabouts.

Suddenly they found themselves on the outside, trailing after the skirt of the crowd.

'Guess your weight, sir?' A plump, red-faced man shouted, grabbing at Simon's arm, 'guess your weight, sir? Twopence only, sir, and if I'm more than four pounds out you'll get a ring free of charge.'

Simon gave him twopence and the man felt his arms and calves, stood back a moment to look at him, and said, 'Thirteen stone two. Will you stand on the scales, sir?'

The arrow spun upwards and hovered around fourteen stone.

'You get a ring, sir,' said the showman, in the tones of a man who has had to give away many rings, 'and what about the lady, sir?'

Ellen backed away hurriedly, shaking her head. Grinning slightly, Simon took her arm and walked her out of the crowd. 'Give me your hand,' he said. Ellen pulled off her glove and placed her palm on his. 'I'm going to give you this ring,' he said lightly. As he pushed it along her finger he noticed a white mark about a quarter of an inch in diameter. Jack's engagement ring, he thought; she's just taken it off.

They took a turning, which brought them into open country. After the close, sour air of the fair fields the hedgerows smelt sweet and fresh. They walked on aimlessly, indifferently, but as the jangle of the roundabouts receded the silence of the land came as a balm to their jaded bodies. After a while Simon said, 'It's funny seeing us like this, Ellen.'

'Ay, Simon.' She pressed his arm, as if she doubted its reality, and then dexterously turned the conversation; 'but we're not so old, Simon . . . you're only twenty-eight, aren't you?'

'Thirty-one,' he admitted, a little reluctantly.

Ellen pressed his arm and asked: 'Simon, d'ye remember your twelfth birthday, when you went ill after eating too much jelly?'

Simon chuckled awhile, then sobered. 'Ay,' he replied, 'mother was alive then. She was mad with me,' he continued reminiscently; 'I remember how she pinched me when no one was looking, and then when I began to cry she gave me a white sixpence.'

Ellen laughed easily, without effort. The sound jarred on the man and he kicked impatiently at a stone. Once he sighed.

'What's wrong?' Ellen asked, craning forward to see his face.

'Oh, nothing,' he lied, staring straight before him. Suddenly he added sharply, 'Stop looking at me like that, Ellen.'

'I'm sorry,' she replied, moving away from him, 'I'm very sorry . . . but I can't see why you should be so nervy.' Her voice sounded thin and far away. He did not reply. They walked in silence through the sleeping fields.

'Oh, hell,' he said, at length. 'I don't see why we should quarrel, do you?'

Ellen returned his look with deliberate indifference, her mouth hard. 'No,' she replied, then melted. He replaced his arm around her waist and asked, 'Can I have a kiss?'

She nodded with her eyes and he wondered how often she had thrown a similar invitation to Jack. I must ask her, he thought, as he placed his lips on hers.

But the woman gave him no opportunity. 'We've broken off our engagement,' she said.

'Oh,' he returned. 'Why?'

'We had a quarrel,' she replied easily. She is lying, he thought. Jack had jilted her. So that was why she threw herself at my head to-night. Jack had jilted her. Worn goods, he thought bitterly, and yet, as she lay in his arms, fondling his hair, he felt a sudden unexpected rush of tenderness. How young she looks, he thought, watching her eyes glow with passion.

'Oh, Ellen,' he cried, pulling her to him; 'Oh, Ellen, my love.' He plucked her white beret to see her hair and she laughed happily. The sound broke from her like a bell and rippled about his ears. As he drew her closer she tossed her head back until her hair fell away in waves.

And so desire swept through him like a flame, fanning his loins to heat. He dropped the woman's beret on the dusty road as she bowed her head on his breast. She is like a reed, he thought, she is like a beautiful reed.

But had he taken the trouble to lift her head he would have seen that Ellen was grinning.

The Apple-Tree

BY GLYN JONES

(From *Life and Letters To-day*)

TWO brilliant hills stood on the coast, with the river swollen between them carefully swallowing the sea. Over the fields of one were spread the shadows of the clouds with the slow wind peeling at them, skinning slowly back off the grasses their dark membrane of shadow, but the sea-thorns were plastered flat and brown in a bush-crust against the round rock of the other, caking its bareness, although a red tree grew on the curve of its only field. A burning sun poured out of the sky on the thick liquid of the sea, and on the ripples of the eating river, and on the shore-pool with its darn of ground-wind, and on the sea-sand, and the timber, and the flesh.

Down at the foot of the field-bearing hill stood a grey cottage. Three children lived there, and the eldest was called Sibli. She wore a bright blue dress, sleeveless, and fastened with gay buttons of scarlet bone, she had rock-black hair and blue eyes, she was tall and narrow, the sunlight hanging tiny cups of shadow under the little shallows of her breasts. She stood among the flowerbeds, the sharp sun pouring over her body, biting into her flesh like the sting of an acid as she watched the full sea flat beyond the garden with a dark flaw running the length of it, and the distant swimming arm of rock, and the few white-wearing clouds. She walked to Robyn's little apple-tree and stood in its openwork of shadow looking for the infant fruit among the dark leaves. But she found nothing, and through the branches she watched Trystan take a fish out of the sea and pass it in through the window, and Robyn upstairs letting a thick lemon thread of wool in a curve down into the garden, brilliant against the grey roughness of the wall. And when her two brothers saw her searching they too came into the garden and helped her; the three children stood together under the tattered

shadow of the tree, the black hair, the orange hair, and the gold, gently pulling back the leaves, heedless of what the sun was writing in shadow upon them.

Trystan wore tall boots and a black jersey; he floated his scarlet boat across the bay, and, having emptied them, spread his new and creamy nets upon the hillside grass to dry. He loved a night with a scholarly moon and a day with the soft sea flowering upon the stones. He wrote in a book for Sibli and for little Robyn, who broke the water with his curl-cap and his golden skin, or came down a tree with an egg in his mouth, or waited daily for the apple-packed tree to spread its curving blush.

Saying 'Little boy with the bird's name,' Sibli went back into the dim cottage to watch her baking bread. There, in the half-darkness, she saw with delight the rigid white arm of the sunlight, thrust in through the little window, kindling the red roses and the glistening lip of the glass jar on the sill. She took a heavy book like a block of gold with black covers off the table and placed it between the glass candlesticks on the mantelpiece, and then she laid the table in blue for three.

Soon Trystan and Robyn came in and sat by the table. When Sibli returned to the kitchen she carried an egg in each pocket of her dress and a plate of slices in her hand. She gave an egg to each of her brothers, and Robyn's was dyed scarlet for his holiday and he kissed Sibli for it. As the children ate, the smell of baked bread was strong and sweet. Sibli went to the fireplace from time to time and knocked at the bottoms of her three loaves with her knuckles, listening to the voice of the bread and to the voice of 'Trystan reciting his poem to her. 'Listen to the wind in the village, Sibli,' he said.

'Clouds go grey for snow or sleet,
The gulls are blown about our street,
Where the lad I'd love to wed
Paints his black boat black and red —
I hope my mop of hair will lie
Tidy till I've passed him by.'

Sibli laughed at that, thinking of her lover. Then she put the loaves in a bag with a rope to it, and Trystan, seeing her do that, left the table smiling and took his bucketful of fish off the sill and poured it into his lidded basket. Robyn wanted a poem then, and before he left the house Trystan said, imitating the children:

'THE LITTLE BOY: That's the lonely wind,
That little one at the door,
Crying to come in.
THE LITTLE GIRL: What's he crying for?
THE LITTLE BOY: The night is so dark and cold,
And ah! he heard when we laughed:
He has for company
Only the dead and the daft!'

Then loaded with his bread and fish he kissed his brother and sister and started off from the cottage for the city, hoping to sell what had been caught and made. Sibli and Robyn watched him go through the mob of flowers from the doorstep, and heard him shout back, because of his load, 'I wish God had put a ring in my elbow.' He went out through the gate and up the hill, waving to his brother and sister until he was out of sight.

When he was gone Sibli and Robyn sat in the garden. Sibli looked round at the hills for the coming of her lover, and Robyn made a long daisy-chain and hung it like a ribbon round and round the trunk and the branches of his little apple-tree.

Trystan came back in the pitch darkness along the road to the cottage. The symbol of his mind after a day in the city burned like the blazing bush, the dark-endangering tree, sentient and unconsumed in bud and branch, the burnt birds tonguing its endured agony of fire. He longed for Sibli, to tell her of his suffering, the phoenix-torture of his mind. As he came into the garden in the pitch darkness the lamplight from the window shone upon the lonely apple-tree. But it did not seem a golden kitchen shine; it was greenish, a cold transparent citrous light filling up the room like a bitter liquid and gleaming out into the garden through

the green panes like a chill liquor held before a candle flame. He stood and watched it in anguish, this evil light shining coldly on the little tree, burning it up in its icy fire, the acid glowing of the leaves, the chill smouldering of the puckered bark braided with its withered daisy-chain. He shivered before it, feeling the cold bandage of the wind about him, and lifting the latch he went into the kitchen.

Sibli was sitting alone, a coat thrown over her shoulders for her bare arms, her bread-fire out and Robyn's clothes ungathered on the floor. The cottage was dim and comfortless. She sat staring at the lamp before her, her face white and her blue dress unbuttoned at the neck, and when she saw her brother she lifted her head and said, 'Trystan, my lover is dead.'

Trystan had been about to speak of the anguish he had himself borne out of the city, but when he heard her say this he stopped and leaned his back against the door. He stood and watched her, longing to be comforted by her as she sat at the table suffering, her elbows before her and her fingers sunk in the black runnels of her hair.

'Sibli, tell me about it,' said Trystan.

'All the afternoon I waited for him,' she answered in a colourless even voice, still staring at the lamp. 'All the afternoon I wandered in the sun of the kind garden. I looked at the shadows but I did not know what time it was; I looked from the full-blooded petal and the long golden globe of the unbroken tulip, and my eyes went up again and again and gathered the roads strapped over the hills, awaiting his coming. I searched for the coming apple-blush in the cool-hearted tree, wondering when he would come. I went out at the water-gate and watched the tide swill its thin silks over the sand. I stood forgetful, remembering his body with delight and suffering, knowing how the ecstasy of love is short and its agony long. A bird dived into the back of the sea and I looked. I saw in the distance, at the place where the last tawn of the pointed sandbar always drowns, a small black figure, it might have been a dog or even a cormorant breaking like a black venus out of the water. I put my scarlet hand to my eyes. The figure seemed to

stand up, it stood with its wings uplifted like a tree or a floating bird. I could tell it was a drowning man already wearing the water around his waist. There was no sound, out of my throat came no voice, only a gull-scream. As I watched I could see the flat tide rising, halving the small black figure with blue from the waist to the breast, from the breast to the shoulders. I turned my eyes away towards the disturbed feathers of the sea upon the water, and when I looked back again the silent arms were still held up like the frozen branches of a tree, black and motionless in the water as the tide lapped the chin of the severed head. Then the hair set and the stiff sloping arms, still rigid, disappeared quickly under the sea.'

Trystan listened in agony, and then, seating himself by the cold hearth, he dropped his head forward and the collapsed flame of his hair fell over his hands. He heard Sibli go on with her speaking, the steady anguish of her voice as she held her face close to the yellow lamplight.

'My spirit ached, I heard the creak of the well-rope. I could not speak, my mouth was dust like the blackened flower-tongue, my eyes dry as the barren fingernail. And I saw my hands were orchards fruited with grief. I wished for thick darkness, for this day to drain like sand back into the sun, or for the bright hand of the rain around me. I saw the torn mouth of the poppy mouth my knee and the stumps of the fractured bridge sticking out of the sides of the hills. The waterbirds cried, the arum's frosted gold was snapped, the lily-bell showed the blood-veins red in her aching throat. I was naked in a bleak island of spotted thistles and my heart was broken like a heart in a picture. I saw on the coasts a drowned body wrapped in red rock under the hawk-hang of my heart — Christ send a night angel to stand by my candle — and the sea was a vivid ruffian that roared over it, gathering his freckled shoulder into the rock. I turned for comfort to the friendly flowers and saw only the nod and windy denial of the rose, while the beech released her leaves upon me like a down of snow or tears. I was heavy, the yarn of gossamer bore down my heart. I saw my grave with the sea pouring into it, and the sun and the

flowers and the stars. I prayed the homing angels to stay with me, to fill my arms in the coming darkness.'

As she spoke Sibli's breasts moved beneath her dress like the working of a yeast. When she had finished speaking the children sat in silence, heedless of the room around them and the night outside and the soft sea-thunder beginning to blow in over the water. At last Trystan got up and opened the large black book upon the table and started to write in it. The little nib went swiftly over the pages, making a breathless sound.

'Trystan,' said Sibli at last, 'tell me quickly about our bread and fishes in the city — the thought of his mouth is like fire that first night with the air and the rain between us.'

'I went up towards the city,' he told her. 'The trees moved round me, each standing in a separate pond of shadow. The thrush was heavy in the hedge. The blackbird hurried along the horizon. The poplar made its fuss and the little hawthorn was heavy with the milks of her bloom. A blue-eyed weed grew in the bank. The hills were pollened with the gold smudge of the ragwort. From the hilltop I saw the white moon blown on before me over the city, transparent, clad in her thinnest flesh. I saw the jaws of the city close round the bottoms of the hill. I saw the brick buildings under the moon, the cock and the arrows and the copper foxes leaping the domes, and the sun poured heavily into the city from the blue bubble of the sky.'

Sibli seemed not to hear him, her knuckles were white in her hair, but she said, 'It was a lovely morning, Trystan.'

Then her brother looked down at his book and read by the lamplight what he had written there.

'Where the roads forked for the city I found a man alone with a broken heart beneath the derision of branches.

'On the outskirts I saw the gay confetti of a crowd among the scarlet and the music and the twisted brass, and the dead lying in rows along the indifferent roadside.

'I entered the primrose chasms of the city and saw the incurable disease called life. I saw the endless flesh flow over the pavements with its symbols, the imbecile with his thistle, the beggar's

violin-string, the black-bottomed cloud above the dwarf and the cripple, the lunatic guiding his shooting canoe.

“I saw the multi-eyed bridge weep out the river from under her hard brows. I saw the sick girl drown unheeded in the city water, the phlegm-slide of her body. I saw the irony of the she-dwarf’s breasts. I saw the bitter man put his hand in his coat and finger his pride. I saw the queue hang out into the street like a measuring-tape for the doom of the city and the skeleton in the sky.

“I saw the agony under forgotten gravestones, and the cemetery tree eating the mourning child. I saw birth buried and the unearthing of death like treasure, the worm working at his thigh and the sovereign yellow in his teeth.

“I saw the great roots grab the rain. I passed the pearly turnstiles of the market place and saw the bunches of snakes and the corners heavily catkinned with serpents. I heard from the string-course the chant of the bitter-speaking corbels, gold, coal, iron and diamonds. I saw the eyes of the changers scrape the facts off my face before they answered my question — and I knew the brutality of a smile. When I brought out my bread I saw the swallowed cornfields in the full belly of the few, and the army of beggars empty and carved out of driftwood. I found the blush rare as the winter bee, and commanded back to the heart. I saw the heartless tasker explain, in an unheeded creature counter-speaking truth from his wrist, and the elbow-brained merchant unmoved at his life recounted to an audience of angels.

“I saw the martyr’s candle, and the fool who would seek out the springs of the whirlwind to destroy them with the truth slit out of his throat.

“I saw the lights come out over the town like a uniform and the elastic reflections in the river, whose tide slid out smooth as the steel withdrawal of a blade. I returned in the dark through the crowds of fabulous faces gazing from the fairground at the crawl of the god-searching rockets. Around me were the flares and the steamy music and the coloured dragons. I saw the bare elbow and the blood ruby, the harelip and the thin-skinned beauty covering the skull —” I can’t go on, Sibli,’ he said, looking up. ‘I can’t

go on. In my basket my fishes were serpents and my bread stones.
His eyes lost their tears upon the open page.

The brother and sister sat hand in hand before the lamp comforting one another, Trystan looking along the thin blade-edges of the twin flames, and Sibli seeing only the flat yellow side of the flame nearest to her. From time to time they heard the pour and tumble of the sea-thunder, and Trystan said, 'Sibli, turn out the light.'

The little apple-tree outside the window disappeared and the whole house and the garden were in darkness. The sky was as dark as the earth, the pit of darkness had been swung above their heads and over the world. Only down near the low water someone had set down his lantern to tie two ropes together, and the little bead of flame gleamed on the stones like a coppered star.

But the noise of the thunder gathered upon the roof of the house. It was like the blowing of a big wind or the metal throb of a great struck pipe humming in the darkness. Then sometimes, with the house shaking, the children heard it drop heavily among the garden beds with the crackle of a cold star falling down.

The children, sitting hand in hand, stared out into the darkness and saw for a moment the pale purple of the sky, the lightning flickering its purple wing along the edges of the sea or the curtain-bottoms of the darkness blown back, letting in the outer brilliance above the dark horizon.

Trystan could feel the blood full in Sibli's hand. They sat close together because the lightning was ready to swing his flashing blade over their heads.

Then of a sudden the earth heaved out of the heavy darkness as though out of black water, it burst up into the glare where the stringy lightning was playing with waved yellow, the world was a brief bubble dandled a moment in the daffodil brilliance of the flash flickering over it. The little light down by the water went out as though it had been kicked into the sea. The black trees leaped out of the garden to their full height and stood for a moment palpable and violent in the brass and radiant ague of the sky. Then

the whole world dropped suddenly like a stone out of the purple-yellow light and darkness swallowed it down again. And the little lamp reappeared, it was to be seen once more boring its tiny red hole in the darkness. The children waited, and the crash came upon the shaking house, loud and heavy like the dropped burden of a big wave.

'Sibli, Sibli!' cried Robyn, 'I'm on fire.'

Sibli ran into the other room and carried Robyn shawled into the kitchen. On the edge of his nightmare grew a bare golden tree gleaming in the darkness and bearing large scarlet fruit. A boy and a bird shared the branches. The smooth gold put on leaves like candle-flames and the burning bird flew into Robyn's breast.

'Sibli, Sibli!' he screamed, 'I'm on fire.'

Then, as the brother and sister comforted the child, stroking his moneyed hair, the lightning dropped into the garden again, it spread its brilliant roots over the little apple tree, it seemed to shake the loosened gold of its pulsing hair over the branches, and they received the burden with uplifted arms, the tree reached up and sucked at the fluid tresses, gulping the lightning eagerly out of the sky like a sucked poison. And then, after a silence, the crash of the thunder came, there was a loud crack as though a huge bone had broken, a long-drawn-out breaking noise as though one of the great bones of the night was cracking slowly from end to end, slowly splitting under some terrific pressure.

The children clung together as the house trembled.

'Robyn's tree won't bear any more,' whispered Trystan.

The Buttercup Field

BY GWYN JONES

(From *The Welsh Review*)

IT was too hot. Far too hot. Gwilliam went slowly down the narrow path, regretful he had left the cold flagged inn. Once only he looked at the sun. White transparent flame licked at his eyes, and then patterns of black circles dripped before him. He blinked, his eyes wet, and the black circles changed to white suns revolving in blackness. He shook his head, muttered, and forced his vision to the bright buff dust of the cracking pathway, the glinting green of coarse hedgerow grasses, and through the high-climbing hawthorn and hazel the intermittent flashing of the buttercup field.

But it was too hot. He was a fool to be out-of-doors. Back at the Rock and Fountain there were stone floors, fresh-wiped tables, cold beer; here in the blaze he could feel a thin spray of sweat pumped incessantly through his pores, and his shirt clung to his back like a snake. The brim of his hat was sore on his damp forehead.

The sun was still short of the zenith. Its rays poured fluently over a gasping world; its brightness was a barrier endlessly interposed between field and stream, flower and leaf, between Gwilliam and the fretwork shadows of the beech trees. The low line of the southern hills was clear and yet infinitely distant, fringed near Tanybwllch with a delicate massing of birch and mountain ash, gently declining on the left into the unseen valley of the Rhanon. To the north the high bare mound of Mynydd Mawr leaned away into mid-air, the lumps of his lofty barrows as distant in space as time. It seemed to Gwilliam that if he shouted in that loaded air, his voice would stop a yard from his lips. And he felt unbelievably alone.

Then he heard a swishing fainter than birds' wings over a lawn. He was almost at the gate and paused to listen. The silence was alive with the thousand thin voices of a summer's day: the humming, buzzing, zooming of insects, dry rubbings of sheathed bodies against grass and bare earth, quiet patterings in the hedges, the marvellously sustained vibration of seen and unseen living things. Then he heard the noise again and knew what it was — the death whisper of grass as it meets the scythe.

He checked at the gate. The buttercup field poured like cloth of gold to the hidden boundary stream, swept smooth and unbroken to left and right in half a mile of flowers, taking the noontide air with the yellow radiance of angels' wings in old manuscripts. The brightness made him unsteady. He had to narrow his eyes, tighten his jaws, for the whole world gleamed like the forehead of a god.

It was then he looked close right and saw the old man. He was dressed in funeral black, most old-fashioned. His hat had a low crown and a wide stiff brim; there were big flat lapels to his coat, which was cut square and long; his trousers were full at the ends and dropped stiffly to his glittering shoes — shoes with bright brass eyelets. Though it was later Gwilliam noticed the eyelets.

He was bending away from Gwilliam, and with a small sickle had cut a straight and narrow swathe some fifty feet long. The buttercups had collapsed like slain infantrymen, and those nearest Gwilliam were already screwing up their petals as the sun sucked the last sap from their stalks. He must have finished his row, for as Gwilliam watched he straightened his back, took off his hat for a moment, replaced it, swung the sickle from one hand to the other, and was setting off again at right angles to his former line when he discovered there was a watcher.

Gwilliam had the impression he was stupefied to see anyone there. He rubbed the back of his left hand across his cheek, and shifted the sickle uncertainly. The sun poured blackly from the turning blade. Then he looked, as though in wonder, at his handiwork.

To make the best of it, Gwilliam opened the gate and went towards him, his feet tearing great gulfs in the spread flowers.

'You are looking for something?' he asked, and glanced from the sickle to its spoils, from the flowers to the old man's face. It was a strong, handsome, wilful face, with a hook nose, eyes deep as mid-winter, white hair under the brim of his hat, and a stiff three-inch beard under the excessive curves of the mouth. There were blackish clefts in his tough-folded cheeks. Seventy, thought Gwiliam, or more. Not less.

'Maybe I am looking for yesterday,' he returned slowly, jerking his chin forward, studying Gwiliam, who felt foolish and snubbed.

'I'm sorry. I made a mistake, I see.' He turned away brusquely.

'No mistake,' said the old man; and as Gwiliam halted, embarrassed: 'I said nothing less than the truth.'

His voice was mellow but powerful, his accent Welsh, his words like rich red earth translated into sound.

Gwiliam felt the great hot hand of the sun against his left side. His heart was throbbing with a slow but mighty action. It was crazy to be standing full in the sun like this, yet his sudden sharpness lay near his conscience.

'Gold is easy enough to find here,' he suggested, gesturing around at the buttercup field; 'but that is not always as precious as yesterday.'

The old man brought down the point of the sickle thoughtfully and cautiously against his heavy toecap. 'My yesterday is a golden one.' For a moment they stood silent. 'I am looking for a gold finger-ring.'

'Then let me help,' said Gwiliam. He shook his head at the flowers crushed by their feet. 'Just where?'

The other still held the sickle against his toecap. 'Where?' He pointed to the drying swathe he had cut. 'That was the back wall of the house.'

Gwiliam frowned, puckered his eyes for the sun and puzzlement. The old man's face moved, but was far from a smile. 'You do not understand. You cannot understand. But I am telling you — the house stood there. Ty'r Blodau Melyn, the Buttercup House, as this field is Cae'r Blodau Melyn, the Buttercup Field.' He looked over towards Mynydd Mawr. 'But it is of no concern.'

'You mean — a house stood here?'

'A house, yes. That was the back wall.' Gwilliam saw play in the muscles of his face. 'But it is of no concern. 'Mae Ty'r Blodau Melyn wedi mynd. The Buttercup House is gone.'

The words of his own language fell from him sombre and poignant, like stones into Gwilliam's hot brain. 'Tell me —' he began, but — 'Listen,' said the old man. 'Listen!' The urgency of his tone made Gwilliam strain for some noise around them, but he heard nothing save the gush of his own blood, and, once, the dry black voice of a crow, till the old man spoke again.

'You never heard tell of Ann Morgan of Llanfair. Lovely Ann Morgan was what the whole world called her. You never heard tell of her? Fifty years ago it would be, now.'

'She lived in the house that stood here?'

'Where we are standing now. But I forgot. You are a stranger. You could know nothing.' Gwilliam saw the sweat jerk down his cheeks.

'Tell me about it,' he said.

'Tell you about what?'

'Tell me about Ann Morgan and the house and the gold ring. There is a story?'

He nodded, looking to the sickle. 'A story,' he repeated. 'I have not forgotten it. Nor,' he almost whispered, 'lovely Ann Morgan.'

Then, like the pouring of water from a jug, he began. Gwilliam wanted to move towards the shade of the beech trees, for the sun had now reached the top of his climb and hurled his beams from behind Tanybwlech as though to burn and kill, but the old man was staring past him as he talked, he could not catch his eye, and so must stand in the trembling air, whilst honey-heavy bees made their broken flight from flower to flower, and the pollen fell in yellow dust about the brass eyelets of the old man's boots.

'Ann Morgan was the daughter of Gwynfor and Jane Morgan, who lived in this house as Gwynfor's parents and grandparents had done. She was their only child, and would take all they had to leave, which was much. So without her beauty she would not have

lacked for a husband — and she was lovelier than the falls of the Teifi at Cenarth.

‘There was a man living at the stone house beyond Llanfair bridge who fell in love with her. Fell in love with her early, when she was ten and he twelve years old. His father was blacksmith to the parish, and shoed horses, repaired wagons, and kept tools as sharp as this sickle. So far as he and the world could judge she too fell in love with him, but later, when she was seventeen or more, and he full man. The parents on both sides were against them: hers because Eos y Fron was poor and a wild young man besides, his because they resented Gwynfor Morgan’s notion of his daughter being too good for the son of a blacksmith. Eos y Fron! The Nightingale of the Fron was the name the people of the county put on him, for he sang lovelier than the thrush in April. From Llanaber to Cwmfelyn, from Maenan to the valley of the Rhanon, there wasn’t a man to open his lips when Eos came into the company. Had he been born a prince a thousand years ago, we should read how he drew the stars out of heaven with the silver wires of his songs.

‘Yet his voice was his danger. There was always open house and free drink for Eos y Fron. That was why he ran wild when very young, and wilder when old enough to know better.

‘It was his voice that won Ann Morgan’s heart. Jane, her mother, died in the winter of one year and Gwynfor in the spring of the next. The suitors were thicker than these flowers: a man to a buttercup in June, and twice as many in July, and all with a house, a trade, a flock of sheep, or a bag of golden sovereigns. And all, so they said, willing to take Ann Morgan in her shift. Though her house and her money, they admitted, would come handy. But one night Eos y Fron came down the narrow path, just as you came to-day, and so to her window, standing ankle deep in flowers. The drink was in him, maybe, but he sang that night to justify his name — and he sang many nights after. No need to be surprised the dog was not set on him. It was a time of full moon, and the field in its light a pale paradise. The quick hour was too beautiful for earth.

‘A fortnight later he met her one evening on the road to the

quarry. They stopped and talked, and he saw her home. The same night next week he saw her again, and often after that, and by bragging, flashing his white teeth, and by singing quietly the songs of the countryside, he made her fall in love with him for all the world to see. He went to work like a slave at the harvest, hoarded his wages though his fellows laughed at him, and before November was out she was wearing his gold finger-ring. They were to be married at midsummer.

'Eos y Fron gave up his pot companions. He accepted no more invitations to houses and taverns, but stayed at Llanfair in his father's house and learned all he could of his father's trade. It dumbfounded the village that a girl could so change a man, and there were plenty to bring up the old proverb: "Once a lover, twice a child." But he did not care. For lovely Ann Morgan he would have done all things under the sun save one, and that one — give up Ann Morgan.

'Before the turn of the year he was oftentimes at Ty'r Blodau Melyn. Sometimes the old servant was there in the room with them, sometimes it was his own mother who went with him, for though he had smutted his own reputation twice or thrice he would have burned in hell before a bad word came on Ann Morgan.'

For the first time his eyes found Gwilliam's. They frightened him. The old man swallowed, nodded several times with harsh movements of his head, and for a moment seemed to arrange his thoughts in order.

'Lovely Ann Morgan!' he said. 'A lovely name for the loveliest woman who ever set foot in the fields of Ceredigion.'

'You knew her well?' Gwilliam asked, knowing his question a foolish one.

'I knew her well. But the tale is of Ann Morgan and Eos y Fron, and John Pritchard the bard of Llanbedr. You must hear the rest of it now.' For Gwilliam had put his hand to his forehead. 'Listen! For three months Eos y Fron found himself in God's pocket, and then, four days after Christmas, John Pritchard came to Llanfair. He was a relative of Jane Morgan, Ann's mother. As was to be expected, he called at Ty'r Blodau Melyn. As was to be expected,

he fell in love there. No one out of childhood would blame him for that.'

'But if he knew she was engaged to be married to Eos y Fron?'

The old man stared. 'If you were John Pritchard — if Eos y Fron had been John Pritchard — it would have gone the same. I tell you, no man in this world could see her as she was that winter at Ty'r Blodau Melyn without throwing the world at her feet.' He looked from the field to the horizon. 'There is nothing in Wales to-day that can give you a notion of Ann Morgan's loveliness.'

'But what did Eos y Fron do?' asked Gwilliam.

'He knew at once. Within an hour. From the way he looked, the way he talked. And John Pritchard knew that he knew, and he cared not a buttercup for all his knowing. He was a bard, as I said, from Llanbedr, and if Eos had the nightingale's voice, John Pritchard had the language of heaven. In a full room, you'd see as many men cry at a poem of his as at a song of Eos y Fron's — and more men laughed when he changed the tune. They reckoned at Llandbedr that John Pritchard knew the metres better than Lewis Tywern's brindle bitch her pups, and if he recited to the weasels he could lead them from the burrows.

'He set himself to win Ann Morgan. Eos y Fron had to work in the daytime, and it was then John Pritchard did his courting. He sat with her for long hours, and from his lips came words finer than Taliesyn's. He could talk like the little waves on the shore at Tresaith, with a music that lapped into your soul, his poems imprisoned the mountain brook, and when he wished his voice was serene as meadows under snow.

'Soon Eos y Fron knew he was losing Ann Morgan. Not that for months she did not keep face with him, but that is one knowledge native to all lovers. In March there were bitter scenes between them. He struck John Pritchard, who did not strike back. One night he struck Ann Morgan. And for that may God hate him through all eternity!

'That was the end. He did not see her for a long while. I have said that he was a wild young man until the last autumn, but now he seemed mad in his wickedness. He went back to the drinking,

was out mornings with the mountain fighters, grew foul-mouthed enough to disgust the foulest, and in less than two months was packed from the house by his father, old Dafydd Glo. This was a heavy blow to his mother, but he made it heavier by cursing both parents as a man would not curse the dog that bit him, and swearing he'd burn the smithy over their heads when next he set foot in Llanfair. That night he went to Ty'r Blodau Melyn with a short iron bar in his hand, and when they refused to open the door, smashed in the biggest window frame and would have done who knows what damage inside had not the labourers run up from the village and bound him.

'For a month he was in gaol in Cardigan, and then came out to terrify all who met him.' The old man looked square at Gwilliam. 'He was a brute, and he lived like a brute. It would be better had he died like one, then.'

'I thought —' Gwilliam began. He was dizzy with the heat. The buttercups seemed to his aching eyes a pool of metal from the ovens, a-flicker, cruel.

'Do not think,' said the other. 'Listen! John Pritchard stayed on at Llanfair. He went oftener to Ty'r Blodau Melyn now. He was a man reckoned handsome, much my height, and had grown a beard as a young man. He was a kind man — the whole world would grant him that. And he loved Ann Morgan as much as man can love woman. No one can tell, but it might well be that between his love and that of Eos y Fron there was no more than a pinhead. But while his rival was giddy and fierce-tempered, even savage in the end, John Pritchard was kind and gentle and yet impassioned. So with time Ann Morgan did not forget Eos y Fron but was glad she had been saved from him. For his name was now filth throughout the countryside.'

The sickle had slipped to the ground. The old man stood there like a black statue, grotesquely still in the blaze of afternoon. To the heat he now seemed indifferent. Even the sweat had dried off his cleft cheeks. The square-cut coat set off his stooping shoulders, as though they were carved from wood. His brow was shaded, but a shaft of yellow light lit the dryness of his lips.

'John Pritchard and Ann Morgan were married on the twelfth day of June.' Gwilliam lifted his head at the date. 'As it might be — yesterday. They were married at the chapel in Llanfair. There was a great to-do in the village, and a feast all day at Ty'r Blodau Melyn. They walked back to the house in the buttercup field, all flaming with flowers as you see it now, men and women, boys and girls, two by two, and John Jones's fiddle to keep their feet and hearts in tune. The guests stayed on late, as they still do in these parts — later by far than John Pritchard wanted them to. For if Ann Morgan had been lovely before, that day she was enough to give eternity for.

'It was eight o'clock when the last guest arrived. It was Eos y Fron, not too drunk. If John Pritchard had killed him then as he crossed the threshold from the buttercup field — But inside he came, and for a while was civil. Most there were afraid of him, the women all. He took the colour from Ann Morgan's cheeks, which before carried such red as Peredur's maiden, like drops of blood on snow. She was Ann Pritchard now, but who would ever think of her as that? Lovely Ann Morgan!'

He fell silent, and Gwilliam, his head a-throb, the hot blood shaken through his bursting veins, was silent with him.

'He came at eight o'clock. Soon after the guests began to take their leave, but he settled himself into the ingle and went hard at the drinking. Some who were there dropped a hint, some were blunt, but Eos y Fron stayed on. At last the only folk there were John Pritchard and Ann Morgan, Eos y Fron and Abel Penry the mason and his wife, who did not wish to leave the three of them alone. Then Abel said outright that they must all be going, and shook Eos y Fron by the shoulder, but he dashed his hand aside and said angrily he'd go in his own time. Abel then made it plain they would be going together — and Abel was craggy as his trade and not a long-suffering man. It was when he found himself slowly levered upright by Abel that Eos y Fron told why he was there. He wanted his ring back. This amazed John Pritchard, for Ann Morgan had seen no reason to tell him that the ring now caught below her knuckle was the other's gift. But he was a reasonable

man; he pointed out that the ring could not be buttered off that night, but that it should be sawed off the next morning. This calmness of his maddened Eos y Fron, who swore she'd not go into the same bed as John Pritchard wearing his ring. He'd see the pair of them in hell flames first. He raved, but as he grew grosser than the sty Abel struck him so hard on the mouth that the teeth cut through his lips and from nose to chin he was a mess of blood. Then he went, and what he said at going was known only to himself.'

The old man, still as a stone, watched his listener. 'There is little left to tell. Not long after midnight a fire broke out in Ty'r Blodau Melyn. It burned with a terrible fierceness, as though it fed on oil and fats and bone-dry wood.' His voice came deeper from his chest. 'John Pritchard and Ann Morgan were trapped in their room at the back of the house. They found the shutters of their window barred from outside, though they had left them open, and John Pritchard lacked strength to burst them apart till the flames spurted up the wall to help him. By that time the clothes were burnt off his body.' He pointed with the sickle, which he had picked up. 'The back wall was here. The window here. The buttercups grew to the very stone. He fell through it, still alive, but the yellow fire took Ann Morgan. All her loveliness went out like a moth's wings in flame.' His hard fingers ripped the rigidity from his face. 'Lovely Ann Morgan!' he sobbed, and crouched into the buttercup field.

The angry sunshine ribbed his black coat with yellow. Sickly, Gwilliam saw how the buttercups threw their pale reflection on the mirror of his polished boots. He swayed a little, hearing him from the ground, brokenly. 'They found John Pritchard that night and took him to a house in the village. It was late morning when they found Ann Morgan. Neither John Pritchard's nor Eos y Fron's ring went into the coffin with her. A beam had crashed on to her left side, and the dust of her hand and arm lies somewhere in this patch of earth. Where I seek my yesterday.'

An age passed for Gwilliam while he did no more than swallow dryly. Then he moved nearer, set a hand on the old man's shoulder, to raise him. 'Mr. Pritchard —'

'Pritchard! You fool, you fool!' cried Eos y Fron, and his hand sought the sickle. 'John Pritchard died that day, good riddance to him! What was his loss to mine? Fool!' He glared up at Gwilliam. 'And what if I did it?' His voice was cut off, his mouth gaped. 'Listen!'

In his eyes Gwilliam saw the chasms of hell. He stumbled backwards, and as his head rocked the buttercup field flashed into living flame. It tilted, flaring past the horizon, licking the mountain-tops, filling the sky with masses of unbearable yellow. Then to his unbelieving ears came the hoarse crackling of fire, the snap and splinter and fluttering roar of a conflagration, and through it, for one moment of agony, the screaming of a woman in terror and pain. He shut his eyes, clasped his hands over his ears, and fell backwards to the ground as red-hot pain welted his cheek. Then, his eyes open, his hands from his ears, he saw Eos y Fron with his sickle and heard his dry cracked laughter. He stepped nearer for a second blow, but Gwilliam lost his faintness under peril, and light-headedly ran for the gate. Into the overgrown path he went, running like a maniac from the sun, hearing a maniac's shouting behind him, and feeling the drip of blood from his jaw to his chest.

His footsteps were set to a tune, and the tune went: 'Eos y Fron is looking for his ring.' But his heart pumped blood to a different rhythm, and the rhythm was: 'Lovely Ann Morgan!'

A Bit of a Do

BY ERIC KNIGHT

(From *The Listener*)

THE stretch of land was covered with coarse heath grass. There was nothing to see on that flatness except the colliery railway going straight over it and, far across the moor, the group of brick houses which seemed to stand there for no reason.

You always got that feeling about Cawley Village when you came over the moor. You felt that it might have been built to the right or to the left, or nearer or farther from you, with just as much reason.

It was toward this village that the two men walked, following a path beside the railway. These men had heavy caps that came low over their grimy faces; they wore blue silk kerchiefs knotted trimly about their throats; and their corduroy clothes were stiff with grime and dust from the coal mines.

They walked on, in step and silent. And then the younger one said, almost violently:

‘A chap’s a bit of a mug to be married these days.’

It was as if his remark came from nowhere and then disappeared. The other took no notice. So they walked, again unspeaking, along the twin files of the path. Their heavy-shod boots fell silently on the packed earth, which thousands of feet passing to and from the pits in years of time had tamped smooth and bare. That way they went on until they were in the village, and then the silence was gone, for there were cobbles now that clanged under their hobnails.

When that sound of marching feet crashed into the sleeping afternoon of the village, it was like an alarm. Yet the village did not spring to life. It became hushed, like a wood where you walk of a summer afternoon and, treading on a dry branch that cracks too loud, you hear the quietness become even quieter, and you know that in unseen places the wild animals are standing, un-

moving, waiting until they discover where you are heading before they go plunging away in sudden panic.

That was how the village was, listening to the sound of feet at a time when no feet should be marching, and as the men walked on, the curtains at the cottage windows swayed as gently as if someone had breathed on them. Then the men knew that women they could not see were watching them stealthily.

They passed the first four houses. By the fifth a woman stood in the sunshine, pegging out the washing. She stood, waiting, a clothespin in her mouth and her hands aloft in the frozen motion of pinning laundry. As the men walked along, only her head moved twisting farther and farther over her shoulder as she watched them, farther and farther until, at last, they had passed her home. Then she ran to the gate in a fierce, agitated sort of way and stared after them.

The men went on, down the sunny street, and then they looked up at a house and halted, staring in a helpless way. And as they waited the village waited with them, and it was so quiet you might believe you could hear the bees working among the blossoms in the tiny front gardens. The older man stared steadily at the house before him. The other shifted his feet and looked back along the street. In the yards that they had passed the women now stood outside their cottages, each one at her garden gate, unmoving, watching the men. But in the other direction the women still waited inside their cottages, as if hiding there.

The older man cleared his throat.

'Well, this is Tich's,' he said.

'Aye,' the other said.

'Away ye go dahn to thutty-two,' the old man ordered. Then he walked with heavy tread to the house.

The young man watched until the other had knocked at the door, then he turned quickly and went on down the street, looking up at the numbers of the houses. Almost at the end he paused. He then pushed open a gate, walked the few paces up the garden path, and knocked at the door. When it opened he stared at the woman. He had not expected her to be so young.

'Is tha Mrs. Barraclough?'

He knew as he said it that it was all a useless routine. He knew that because of the way her hand clutched at the door.

So there was no need to say anything — but everything in life had to be done 'proper.' 'There were ways of doing things, and you did them that way.

'Ah'm Percy Meggatt, missus — fro' over t' pit,' he said. 'We've had a bit of a do.'

He watched her as she backed away into the darkness of the cottage, leaving the door open. He stood uneasily for a moment. Then he knocked the dirt from his feet, kicking the sides of his boots against the stone step. He did this partly because he wished to be polite, but more because he wanted to put off what he had to do, if only for a few seconds more. Then he pulled off his cap and went in. He saw her sitting in a rocking-chair, staring fixedly at the fire.

In the warmth and half-dark of the cottage the moments slipped past, and he could hear no sound except his own breathing and the occasional bubbling hiss of the gassy coal. He took a red kerchief from his pocket and mopped his face. The movement wakened her.

'What was it, lad?' she asked.

'Well, we was in us gallery, and we had a bit of a cave-in. Well — now doan't tak' on — but Ah gate to tell thee. Well, thy measter, now, he were hurted a bit. Now doan't thee be upset —'

'Bad?'

The flat shortness of her voice cut away his words.

'Well, now — doan't tak' on,' he droned. 'Us digged him out right fast, but a bit o' summat had cotched him on t' yead —'

'Dec-cad?'

He didn't know whether she had asked it or stated it. He could find no ready words; so instead he fumbled in his trousers pocket and drew out a heavy watch and chain. Walking over, he put them in her unresisting hands. She did not look down at the watch; only let her hands fall to her lap and then, staring at the fire, she began to rock in her chair, gently at first, and then faster and faster. It

was as if that rocking were releasing all that she could not express in words.

The young collier, watching her, felt that it was not as he had expected, and he was uncomfortable. It had not gone in a 'proper' manner. Properly you went through an accustomed routine. You said that there had been an accident. Then you said the man was hurt a little bit. Then you said he was hurt quite a deal. After that you said he was 'right bad.' Finally you admitted that he was dead.

That was the way you broke the news gently — bit by bit. And when the woman heard it she covered her face with her apron and cried and could not be comforted; so you took the poker and rapped on the chimney-back for the woman next door. Then she came in and the other women came with her and took matriarchal charge of it all, and that was the point where you slipped away, having done all things properly.

But this woman had done none of the things properly. She had known everything from the first. She had not cried. And because the routine was broken, there was no cue for him to leave.

He felt disturbed because it was not as he had pictured. The woman herself was not as he had pictured. She was much too young — anyhow, much too young for Barraclough. He had worked for months beside Barraclough; yet, in their curious, rough, Northern way they had spoken of little beyond the details of the work which took up most of their waking hours. He had known Barraclough was married. But he had pictured the wife as being middle-aged and rough-voiced like Barraclough himself; not young with bright, corn-gold hair that glinted in the firelight as this woman's did.

'Happen tha'd like me to knock o' t' chimney-back for a neighbour, missus?' he suggested.

'Nay,' she said quickly. Then she explained: 'Ah keep to mysen.'

'Aye,' he said.

There was an awkward silence.

'Happen Ah could mak' thee a cup o' tea,' he offered. 'Ah'm handy, like.'

She shook her head.

'Well, if there's owt Ah could do for thee,' he said. 'They'll be bringing him hoam here to-neet.'

'Thank you kindly,' she said.

'Well,' he said, lamely. 'Ah sadly hate to leave thee like this . . . but Ah maun get ovver Cotherbeck way —'

She rose as he shuffled his feet, and she saw, now that his cap was off, the white of a bandage against his crisp, black hair.

'Why, tha's hurted, too,' she said. 'And me setting here!'

She stood facing him, her eyes shifting in a troubled way.

'Eigh, missus, it's nowt,' he smiled.

'But they've bandaged it.'

'Nay, it were nobbut a bit of a cut — just enough soa Ah had to knock off for t' day. That's why they axed ma to coom tell thee — Ah had to laike t' rest o' t' day onyhow.'

'And all that road to walk,' she said. 'Nay, it'd be a poor thing if Ah let thee goa all the road to Cotherbeck be-out a little summat i'side thee.'

'Nay, missus. Ah wouldn't want to put thee to all that bother.'

'Eigh, it wouldn't be noa bother, surely, measter. Heh, and thee poorly wi' thy yeard and all! Just sit thee there.'

'Well, if tha says.'

So he sat, watching her as she moved about the cottage preparing tea in a distracted sort of way. He felt that he should be saying comforting things, but she didn't seem to need them.

'Now, if tha needs ony help wi' t' burying,' he began, 't' lads at pit —'

'Nay,' she interrupted, and her voice had a sort of pride in it, 'the's t' lodge. Ah allus kept up t' burying dues, no matter what. And there'll be insurance, too. Ah kept both them up.'

She seemed not to encourage his formal words, so he was lost and sat there, watching her move about, and seeing how the fire-light glinted on the lightness of her hair and on the great white apron she wore.

It was then he saw she was far gone in pregnancy, so he jumped up and took the kettle from her hand and filled it at the sink.

When the tea was made and the table set, she sat opposite him. He was looking at her intently, and feeling the nearness of himself to a woman, and then he remembered almost guiltily that he had forgotten about death. He knew she had, too. It seemed unbelievable that they could have become more aware of each other than of death itself. Because they had not said the things properly in the custom, they had lost the thing itself.

So, feeling lost, he clutched at custom again. 'They were taking tea. There were things always to be said about that.

'Eigh, there's nowt like a real nice cup o' tea,' he said.

Almost gladly she reached for the firm ground with him.

'Tha's nice to say soa,' she said. 'Ah'm that sorry there's nowt but bread 'n' booter.'

'Well, tha couldn't be expecting company, like,' he said.

As she spoke he was looking at a small, purple bruise on her cheekbone. He thought of Barraclough, alive. He was a dour, rough sort. When a man like that was drunk, he would beat his wife.

Her mind saw what he was thinking, and she put up her hand to the bruise. She said, fiercely:

'Ah rubbed it too hard wi' a towel. That's what Ah did.'

He bowed his head over his tea, and they reached once more for the comfort of routine. When she spoke again her voice was flat, interrogating in the way of women when they were being the polite hostess:

'Tha said thy hoam were i' Cotherbeck, Measter Meggatt?'

'Aye — in a sort of way. Ah'm nobbut lodging theer.'

He swilled his tea politely in his cup. The silence seemed to call for more words, so he said:

'Ah'm a gipsy sort of chap truly — moving hither and yon, as you might say. Properly Ah'm fro' up ayond York.'

'York?' she echoed happily. 'Dosta knaw Malton way?'

'Middling well, Ah dew.'

'Then tha knaws Aller Green, happen?'

'Aller Green? Like the back o' ma varry own hand, Ah dew. Ba gum, Ah wish Ah hed a bob for ivvery time Ah've cycled threw Aller Green.'

'Cycled!' she repeated. 'Eigh, dosta mind a farm, now, t' fust 'un just ovver t' brig t' other side o' Aller Green?'

'Tha means t' little white place wi' a laburnum tree this side o' t' house?'

'That's it!'

'Aye, Ah dew that. The's hawthorn hedging dahn one side of about a ten-acre pasture, then the's huddle fencing t' other side, and two year ago they hed about fower acre o' curly broc'li set out theer — and the's a couple o' Airedales they got.'

'That's it,' she cried. 'Now doan't that cap all! Why, that's ma feyther's farm.'

'Thee fro' farming folk? Well, if this ain't a do! Eigh, Ah'm a farming lad mysen.'

'Thee? Well! Fancy that, now!'

She shook her head in admiration.

'Well, no wonder tha remembered so well,' she said. 'And the tarriers, too.'

'Eigh missus, them's varry likely-looking tarriers. If Ah said that to mysen once Ah've said it a hundred times. Ah'd be cycling past — Ah were working near Malton — and Ah'd say to mysen, Ah'd say: "Now there's a varry, varry likely-looking pair o' tarriers, if ivver Ah clapped eyes on one." That'd be the varry thing Ah'd say to mysen.'

She beamed with pride.

'Them's our Alfred's,' she said.

Their minds wandered happily over what they had said.

'Well, what made thee goa into t' pits if tha's a farming lad, Mcaster Meggatt — if tha doesn't mind me axing?'

He studied his cup.

'Well,' he said slowly. 'It were the brass. Tha sees, Ah'm saving up for a varry speēal reason.'

'Oh,' she said.

He hardly heard her.

'Ba gum,' he said, 'here Ah were fretting ma yead off on what tha'd do. Why, tha can goa back to thy feyther after t' burying and things.'

She shook her head, slowly.

'Ah cannot goa back,' she intoned.

He looked at his cup, and at his hands, grime-blackened.

'Tha sees,' she said suddenly, 'him and me — well, we weren't churched. That's why them will n't coom.'

She motioned with her head toward the wall dividing her from the next cottage.

After that they were silent a long time. Finally she rose and began clearing the table. He wanted to say something — to comfort her — but he knew no words that would march happily with his meaning.

'Well, Ah maun be off,' he said.

He rose and, holding his cap, walked to the door. She gave no sign of awareness and that troubled him. He felt as if there were tangled ends, flying loose, and that if he could catch them somehow, a bright pattern would begin weaving between them.

He turned at the door and watched her. Suddenly he walked back to the table, feeling almost angry.

'Sitha,' he said, brusquely, 'that varry special reason Ah'm saving up for — tha knaws what it is?'

She stood, her eyes looking at the stone floor, as she waited. He wondered why he had asked her the question — why he had come back. Then she looked up at him and her eyes seemed, somehow, to be full of fear.

'Well, it's this way,' he said, and his voice was soft now. 'If a chap gets to Canada, like, and — well, now -- happen he's a chap that knaws a little summat abaht farmin', in a manner of speaking, well, then, there's a hundred and sixty acres waiting that the Gov'-ment'll hand him if he'll nobbut work on it three year.'

He waited.

'A hundred and sixty acres,' she said.

'Aye. That's a sight o' land, ent it? And all a chap's got to do is last it out three year, come fair and come foul, and it's his. And that's what Ah mean to say, is if a lad saves up, like . . . well, he can get to Canada and all for twenty pound. And that's the varry special reason Ah'm saving up for. Ah've saved nigh on eighteen

pound, and the varry same day Ah mak' it twenty — then Ah'm off.'

They stood and looked at each other.

'Ah s'all have more nor twenty pound, Ah will,' she said soberly. 'Ah'll have twenty pound and more when ma insurance cooms in.'

When she had said that, they both smiled, suddenly, as if what she had said had opened a path before them.

With a quick motion that was youthful, he swung his cap round on his finger. 'Then he caught it with a slap of his other hand.

'Well,' he said, 'Ah suppose Ah maun be off.'

'Ah suppose tha maun.'

But he didn't go. He shifted his feet.

'Dear me,' he said. 'Ah doan't know what coom over me — telling thee about Canada and all.'

'Eigh, it is a fair puzzle sometimes what mak's folk talk,' she said. 'It's right mystifying.'

'That's what it is,' he agreed. 'Right mystifying.'

He went to the door. 'Then again he turned and waited.

'Sitha,' he said. 'Ah just happened to think. If Ah could do owt for thee wi' t' burying, like.'

'Nay, t' lodge'll send pallbearers,' she said.

'Aye, Ah know. But if tha should like somebody to walk behind t' coffin wi' thee, happen. It'd lewk all reet, because it's little enow a chap could do — for his own mate in the same gallery and all, as you might say.'

'Well there's that,' she agreed.

'On course there is,' he said firmly. 'And then, after all is said and done with, it ent exactly like we're strangers: thee cooming fro' Aller Green — and me fro' up beyond York and all. Well, Ah feel like we are almost relatives, or summat — in a manner of speaking.'

'Why, that's it,' she said, happily. 'It could be we were varry much like relatives. Happen that's why Ah could talk so free, like, wi' thee.'

'Why, surely,' he agreed. 'That would be it.'

They stood and looked at each other until time caught them.

'Ba gum,' he started. 'Ah've been saying Ah'll goa for t' last ten

minutes. Ah doan't know what tha'll be thinking o' ma manners. Well, Ah'll see thee at t' burying, then, missus.'

Then he opened the door, and the women waiting at the cottage gates saw him stride down the path. Instead of heading for Cotherbeck he struck out to the open moor, going with quick, urgent strides.

Inside the cottage the woman still stood by the window after he was out of sight. Her mind kept telling her that she was going to see him again — that he was coming back for the funeral. She tried to stop thinking it, because she felt that she ought to be thinking about her husband who was dead. She became so angry and ashamed at herself that she began to sob.

And as she cried there the women came from the other cottages. For they were truly helpful to one another in bad times, and they wanted to console and comfort her even though she was a woman who lived with a man without marriage lines.

So, now the women were there, and the contact with the young collier was broken and gone, custom began to seize her. Custom was stronger than she — stronger than them all. She threw her apron over her head, and crossed her arms over her breasts and embraced herself, and rocked on her heels, moaning pitifully. And still her mind kept thinking of the young collier, even though her cries and her pain were real.

But the women, comforting her, were very satisfied and proud of her, thinking her grief properly splendid for a woman whose husband had been killed.

The Apple

BY ELISABETH KYLE

(FROM *The Manchester Guardian*)

NOT since the war began had a train passed through this small station on the frontier line between Hungary and what was once Polish Ruthenia. The train had taken long to arrive, for a snow plough had first to pass down the line. The foothills of the Carpathians were deep in snow. Now and then a wooden church, grotesquely carved, appeared to shake its head free of the snow. The passengers on the train, who were mostly soldiers or Russian officials travelling to take up their new duties, gazed out of the windows with monotonous interest. When the train stopped at last they stretched themselves, cursing and grumbling at having to leave even the rickety shelter of the carriages for the piercing cold outside, and made for the waiting-room.

This was a mere shed through whose cracks the air crept icily and the snow falling outside congealed and trickled on to the clothes of the people who sat round three sides of it. In the middle of the room an oil stove gave out a little warmth. Those fortunate enough to have still some food left of the supplies brought with them began to eat. The others continued to sit staring at the stove and waiting till the train which had brought them should be shunted out of the way to make room for that which would take them over the frontier into Hungary; or eastward again towards Lwow.

Among the former passengers was a woman, the widow of an Hungarian commercial traveller, who had been trapped with her husband and children in Poland at the beginning of the war. They had accompanied him on a business tour, visiting some Polish relatives while he proceeded to Warsaw, where he had been killed by a stray bullet. Her Hungarian passport had permitted her to retrace her steps at length, and by devious ways. The names of her four children were inscribed on it as well, for all were under

age. They played cheerfully enough about the stove, knocking each other about and keeping so constantly on the move that, as one passenger grumbled, they appeared to be twice the number they really were.

Suddenly the wooden door of the shed was pushed open and another woman entered, timidly this time. She was a Pole, and she led by the hand a little boy so thin that the bones seemed to be starting out of his face. In the half-darkness of the shed her entry was scarcely noticed, save by those who were near enough the door to feel the draught as it opened and shut. She cast one quick glance round, then slipped into the empty space beside the Hungarian woman, who, struck with pity for their half-starved looks, extended one end of her travelling-rug towards them, with a few words of greeting in broken Polish. The woman answered in a husky whisper, easily drowned by the noise the playing children made about the stove. Her boy stared at them, his peaked face just visible above the folds of the travelling-rug.

Again the door swung gustily open. 'Passengers for Lwow,' called out the station master, and half the occupants of the waiting-room got up and stamped out noisily. But even now the little cramped room seemed as full as ever, for the children played and jumped wildly about from the empty spaces on the bench to the floor again; and still the Polish child watched them, wide-eyed, with a thin flicker of a smile on his face, while his mother and the other woman went on whispering softly above his head. . . .

At last he felt the warm rug twitched from him, while at the same time, to distract his attention, the strange woman held up an apple before his eyes. He swallowed hungrily, eyeing it. 'This apple is yours,' whispered the Hungarian, 'if you will first play a little with my children. Run and jump with them a little, as they do. Do anything they do, and presently, when I tell you, though not before, you may eat the apple, and a piece of bread as well.'

The boy looked up at his mother, who nodded and pushed him gently off the bench. He took a few hesitating steps towards the stove and was immediately cannoned into by one of the children, who rolled him to the floor. Presently all the children were mixed

up, and to escape them he had to spring on to the opposite bench, only to be chased from it with shouts of laughter by the little Hungarians, who now, in a moment, seemed to have accepted him as one of themselves. When the passport officer came into the shed a few seconds later it was already so dark that he had to scrutinize the papers of the Hungarian passengers by the light of the lantern he had at his belt. One only, the commercial traveller's widow, had a row of children's names written down under her own. He cast a hasty glance at the knot of children struggling on the floor, stamped the passport, handed it back to her, and then held out his hand towards the Polish woman.

But she shrank from him, almost as though she expected a blow already. 'Forgive me, Pani,' she said, 'but I only came to this shed for a little warmth. I live down in the village —'

'Out of it, then, quickly.' He took her by the shoulder and pushed her towards the door. 'This shed is for passengers only. You had no right to be there.' Then he turned towards the remaining figures, huddled half-asleep about the room. 'All aboard for Miskolcz!' he cried, waving his lantern.

The Polish boy remembered his apple. He ran across towards the Hungarian woman and asked for it. But she only smiled and drew him with her towards the door. 'The game goes on in the train,' she whispered. 'In the train I will give you your apple.' He looked round for his mother, but again she reassured him. 'She has gone on ahead. You will see her again after you are in the train.'

The carriages were half-empty, for few had permits to cross the frontier. All the children took possession of one, while the mother settled herself in a corner and unpacked some food. This made her think of the extra mouth to feed once they got to Budapest; but then she thought, too, of the winter settling down on these barren hills, and the half-famished village populace, and the determination of that other mother rather to part with her son than to see him starve. . . .

He was half-way through his apple already. As they passed over the bridge he was far too busy to see and to wave to the other woman who stood there, staring after the train.

The Wanderers

BY ALUN LEWIS

(From *The Welsh Review*)

THE heat inside the caravan was too much for her. The wooden wall-boards were warped and the blue paint bubbled and flaked by the burning high noon. She fell asleep in the middle of stitching a corner of the red quilt over a tear in the boy's trousers. Running up the steps in nothing but his rough green jersey, the boy found her lolling open-mouthed in the chair, beads of sweat on her pale face. He twined his grubby fingers in the fall of her black hair and pulled gently.

'Wake up, mam,' he said, 'Dad's coming across the fields.'

She woke with a start, surprised to find herself sleeping.

'Jewks!' she muttered, rubbing her eyes. 'I'm that sleepy. Where is he, Micah?'

'Just crossing the river,' Micah replied. 'He's got two rabbits.'

'We'll have a change from bread and dripping, then,' she said, yawning. 'Here, let's finish this patch. You've not been out like that, have you?'

'Only to the river,' he answered. 'I seen a dragonfly an' followed him till he pitched. Look!' He opened his grimy fist to show the crumpled corpse of a yellow-barred dragonfly. Grey-pink matter oozed from its long tail and congealed on his palm.

Revolted, she slapped his face.

'Oh, Micah, you cruel,' she shouted, her face twisted up; 'you mustn't —' The boy was weeping passionately, hiding his face in her black frock and pressing his little body against the dark warmth of her loins.

'It's the gipsy blood you've got from your father,' she said. She stood so still. And then, suddenly, she saw that he was weeping and hiding for shame in her body. Swiftly she stooped over him and lifted him into her arms.

'Micah, Micah,' she murmured, kissing his hair and running her hands over his naked buttocks and down his almond-brown legs. 'There, there, stop crying, my darling.'

'Stop dandling the kid, for Christ's sake!' the gipsy shouted. She shivered and almost dropped the boy. He had come in so quietly.

'He was nigh choking,' she said sullenly. Her voice was hard and reserved. Micah had stopped crying and stood in the corner, trying to stifle the sniffling sobs that broke from him.

'You'll make a woman out of him,' the gipsy sneered. 'Coddling the boy. Cover your backside, boy, before I bruise it for you.'

Micah hastily grabbed his trousers and, sitting on the floor, pulled them over his legs.

'Sell any pegs this morning?' the gipsy asked.

She pointed to the bed.

'There's one and six under the mattress,' she said, almost scornfully.

He lifted up the mattress, took the money out and counted the coppers slowly. She watched his greasy brown hands fumbling over the coins.

'Good,' he grunted. 'I sold two bobs' worth myself. Christ, it's hot.'

He unlaced his boots and stretched his swollen red toes. His thick curly hair lay in a mat of sweat on his forehead. His beady brown eyes were brilliant with heat.

'There's an ironmonger selling out in the town,' he said. 'Promised to sell me sixty tin boilers for ten bob. I said I'd call back for them.'

'We haven't got ten shillings,' she answered, looking out from the caravan door at the blue haze on the hills.

'I can pawn something,' he said.

'Pawn what?' she asked. Her back was towards him, her voice listless.

The young corn was blue and still before her eyes. A slash of poppies burnt a red wound across the field.

'I was thinking it would be worth it, just for two days,' he said

cautiously. 'We'd make a quid on the selling and then I'd recover them.'

'What?' she said.

'Your ear-rings,' he ventured.

'All right,' she said, swinging her foot nonchalantly.

He had expected a quarrel. But instead of being relieved at her acquiescence he was angered by her indifference.

'I'll take them now, then,' he snapped. 'And get them rabbits skinned and in the pot 'gainst I come back. Where the hell has that boy gone? Micah!' he shouted.

No reply. He ran down the steps, calling again.

'What're you doing under there, in Christ's name?' he snarled, pulling the trembling child from under the caravan. Micah cringed. 'What's two and two?' the gipsy asked, holding him by his hair.

Micah did not reply.

'What's two and two?' the gipsy repeated, threateningly.

Micah's lips quivered.

'Four,' said the gipsy, 'One - two - three - four,' shaking the boy at each count. 'You're a fine scholar. Get on and help your mother skin them rabbits.'

Micah ran up the steps to his mother. He looked up at her, but she was looking fixedly across the fields. The gipsy turned away without a word and set off along the hedge.

It was a mile to the town, down Lovers' Walk by the river and across the common. The children stopped their cricket to watch the lean, dark stranger in the garish blue smock coat. They gathered fearfully together until he had passed. Gipsies steal little boys and take them away in their caravans, to vanish mysteriously into the wide other world. He passed the crowd of farmers outside the cattle market and climbed the steep shopping street. Ladies in white frocks stood under the window shades outside the milliners' and confectioners' shops. A podgy barman stood at the door of the Wheatsheaf, sunning himself between hours. Children clustered round an ice-cream barrow. The tar melted on the road, burning the gipsy's feet. He turned down a side street and entered a tobacconist's. A shrivelled little Jew with scant, mousy hair and

watery, peering eyes popped up ingratiatingly from behind the counter. His withered smile hardened as he looked at the gipsy.

'W-ell,' he wheezed, rubbing his hands dubiously together.

'I want to pawn these ear-rings,' the gipsy said, fishing them out from his deep poaching pocket and laying them on the counter.

The Jew bent over them, fondling them with his skinny fingers. The gipsy could only see the red tip of his pointed nose.

'Six shillings?' The Jew raised his puckered face

'Ten,' the gipsy said.

The Jew lowered his discoloured eyes to the ear-rings. A dray rumbled past. The Jew looked out on the sunlit street and saw a pile of steaming horse dung outside the door.

'One minute,' he said. 'Excuse me, please.' He fetched a bucket and spade from the kitchen at the back of the shop, shuffled hurriedly into the street, scooped the manure into the bucket, and returned into the shop, smiling.

He put the bucket in the kitchen and shuffled back to the counter, rubbing his hands on his trousers.

'Well, then, eight,' he said.

'All right,' the gipsy replied.

The Jew counted the silver into the gipsy's palm.

'I'll reclaim them in three days,' the gipsy said, placing the receipt and the money in his trousers pocket.

'Very good, sir, very good,' the Jew wheedled; 'a nice day, isn't it?'

The gipsy spat on the doormat as he went out. He went straight to the ironmonger's, who promised to deliver sixty boilers at the caravan in the evening, and then, after a pint at the Wheatsheaf, the gipsy made his way out of the town.

During the next four days the caravan covered twenty miles, the tin boilers and cans rattling like skeletons in corrugated iron coffins as the skinny piebald slipped and stumbled down the stony lanes. They were following the river to the coast, selling their ware at farms and cottages and villages. The gipsy was in a good mood, for they were selling well and he enjoyed walking at the horse's head even more than haggling. He let Micah sit on the mare's

back when the road was flat, and he whipped the heads off the hedgerow dandelions and sang to himself. By the end of the fourth day there were only two boilers unsold. They decided to spend the night in a little pasture by the river, and after unharnessing the mare and tethering her to a hazel the gipsy stripped and swam in the stream. The cold green water seemed to flow through him, dissolving his tired, sweaty body into energy and delight. He climbed on to the bank and lay in the long grass, biting off the leaves of sorrel with his teeth and tasting the bitter-sweet juice on his tongue. Micah was playing near him, yellow as a bee with rolling in the buttercups. His wife was sitting hunched up on the steps of the caravan.

'Hoah, hoah, hoah,' a girl's clear voice made him sit up in surprise. 'Hoah, hoah, hoah,' strong and bell-like and vibrant. Ah! there she was, two fields away, calling the cattle in. The reddening sun caught her obliquely so that one side of her was light, fleshy, quick, the other silhouetted darkly.

The gipsy pulled on his trousers and shirt, laced up his boots, and returned to the caravan. He tied a scarlet muffler round his neck, combed his hair back, and hooked the two remaining cans on to the crook of his arm.

'There's a farm over the fields,' he said. 'I'll try and sell these

His wife nodded without lifting her bowed head.

With light springy steps he followed the girl. The cows were walking in a line before her, tossing their heads at the swarming flies, their full udders swinging against their hind legs. The gipsy caught her up as she was entering the cowshed. She looked at him boldly.

'Would your mistress need any cans?' the gipsy asked, his voice silken and lilting.

'Mistress is at market,' she replied, pressing her full hips against the lower half of the cowshed door and stretching back a little. Her breasts pressed against her cotton blouse, strong and round.

'Well, do *you* want anything?' he asked, the wild blood burning in his fingers and flushing into his neck.

'I've got no money for nothing,' she laughed. Her teeth were

white: Christ, they were white, close against her lips; her full, laughing lips and her fresh cheeks and her bright dark-flecked eyes. The gipsy smiled. His face was devout and eager, even when he smiled.

'I'll milk your cows for nothing,' he said.

'Are you a careful one?' she asked, tossing her head back.

'Yes, I'll be careful,' he said.

She opened the cowshed door and he followed her in. The shed was low and warm with the fodder and the cows' breath and the sweat of their bodies. The darkness was rich and luminous, as though it were cloudy with purple, intangible grapes. The chains rattled as the haltered cattle turned restlessly in the mangers, waiting to be milked.

The gipsy's wife came up to the farm with three pennies and an empty jug, wanting a pint of milk. From the gate she saw the girl come out of the shed, picking the straw off her shoulders and pulling her dress into shape. The gipsy came out after her, brushing his hair back with his hand and caressing the girl with his eyes. He did not see his wife, and she turned back with the empty jug and made her way behind the hedge to the caravan. When she got back to the river she found Micah talking to a swarthy, dark-haired man. He wore a black flannel shirt and brown corduroy trousers; his chin was covered with a light stubble and his eyes were bright as blackberries. He looked up when he heard her step and smiled. She was breathing heavily, her bosom heaving as though she could not suppress the life inside her.

'He's a Frenchman, mam,' Micah said portentously. 'Aren't you, mister?'

The man laughed, caught Micah by his leg and wrist and swung him up and down.

'*Pas tout à fait, mon vieux,*' he said. '*Je suis Breton — plus gallois que français.*'

'Can you tell what he's saying, mam?' Micah asked.

She smiled. 'I can't understand,' she said.

Her face was dark and engrossed, her eyes filmy.

'You are dreaming of what?' asked the Breton.

'Eh?' she turned to him, her face suddenly aware and passionate.

'Your thought was absent,' he said.

'Yes.' She laughed breathlessly. Her eyes knotted again.

'You are a pedlar like me?' the man asked.

She saw a smooth, rounded pole in the grass, notched at each end, with long strings of onions lying beside it.

'Johnny Onions?' she asked.

'Yes,' he laughed, 'Johnny Onions. I leave my family in Brittany, I sail with my brother to Cardiff. I sell my onions across Wales, making friends with the little boys. This pullet — is he a gipsy?'

Micah tugged at her skirt, but she ignored him.

'Half and half,' she said. 'His father is a gipsy — he used to live with the Pembroke tribe. I'm Welsh — my father is a farmer.'

'You speak nice,' the Breton said.

'I went to school,' she answered, and paused. 'I didn't learn enough to keep me out of trouble, though.' She laughed. He looked at her for a moment in silence.

'You like this life?' he asked.

She tugged nervously at the grass.

'Mam, look at this ladybird,' Micah said, lifting his cupped hand. She did not hear.

'I do not like living in a house,' she said.

The Breton stretched his sunburnt arms above his head.

'Well, I go before dark,' he said.

'Stay and eat with us,' she said suddenly.

He looked into her dark, brooding face. 'Better I go.'

'No, stay,' she begged. It was as though he caught a sudden glimpse of hell. Her eyes and lips, the very look of her, were momentarily alive with a dark, intense passion, as if night had broken into a wild, translucent dawn and still remained night. Her mood enveloped him like heat, filtering through his body, creeping through the roots of his hair. Micah put his arms round her neck, tightly, and bit into the white flesh at the nape of her neck. She screamed as his teeth cut through her skin and sprang to her feet, shaking the child off her back. Micah cowered on the grass,

quivering like an animal. She stood over him, pale, her hand fingering the wound in her neck. For a second she stood, tense and trembling. 'Then she threw herself full length in the grass and her shoulders shivered with sobs. The Breton knelt over her, laid his hand on her hair, caressed her.

'It is all right, my darling,' he said. 'It is all right. Do not, please —' Micah caught his hand.

'Don't touch her,' he hissed.

'What's up?' The gipsy stood over them. He walked as silently as a fox.

'The little boy bite his mother,' the Breton said.

The gipsy bent down, his fist clenched. Micah had turned limp and sallow. The gipsy hit him with his fist. The boy gasped. He was limp as a jelly. The gipsy hit him again, and again, ferociously. Then he straightened his back and looked down at the sprawling woman and the kneeling man.

'Johnny Onions?' he asked.

The Breton nodded. 'Your wife asked me to stay to eat,' he said; 'eat my onions, eh?'

The gipsy laughed. Warmth flooded back into his body and he swung his arms.

'Sure, stay. We'll eat fried onions together.' He touched his wife with his boot. 'Come on,' he said. 'I'll light a fire.'

The Breton put his hands under her armpits and lifted her to her knees. She got up lithely to her feet and entered the caravan, keeping her face averted. Micah slipped off, crouching, into the copse. The gipsy opened his clasp knife, cut three beech branches, tied the tops together with a length of wire, sharpened the other ends, and stuck them into the ground to make a three-legged stand for the kettle. He worked dexterously, whistling between his teeth, engrossed and happy. The Breton watched the woman busying herself with cups and bread and frying-pan. Micah returned with an armful of dry brushwood and gorse and laid it by his father. The gipsy looked up, smiled at him. Micah's face was white and serious.

'Little weasel,' the gipsy mocked.

The gipsy talked and laughed a lot as they ate the fried onions. He did not grumble that there was no milk for the tea. He told the Breton tale after tale of his youth with the Pembroke tribe. He showed a blue weal down his side; the country folk called them Furies. His wife looked coldly at his animated face. Micah sat close to her side, his face shining in the firelight, his hand resting on her knee. Now and again he regarded the two men opposite him — his father and the strong, tawny Johnny Onions — and edged nearer the soft warmth of his mother. She covered his small hand with her own and watched unobserved the fire flickering over the stranger's face.

When the meal was finished she put Micah to bed in the caravan, set a dry stump on the dying fire, and stayed listening to the talk of the two men. The Breton was working his way down the coast to Cardigan. There he would meet his brother and together they would return to Cardiff, selling in the coast towns of Pembroke and Carmarthen. It was not as pleasant as Brittany; at home there were friends in the evenings, *bons copains*; but better than starving, or working in a Paris factory. He choked in the city.

The gipsy lay back and yawned.

'I'll sleep out here to-night,' he said drowsily. 'It's too hot to sleep indoors. You sleep on the grass, too, Johnny?'

'Hay after harvest dead and soft,' the Breton laughed; 'before the harvest sweet and hard. I sleep on my feet easy.'

The gipsy yawned and turned comfortably on to his side.

'Goodni,' he said thickly.

They sat still by the fire, watching the flames dancing red and blue and yellow over the crackling wood. Occasionally a red ash leaped into the air with a small explosion and floated up into the purple dusk and lost its fire. The meadow was silent, washed with the scent of leaves and grasses, tremulous with the down-pressing night. The Breton looked up from the fire and caught her looking at him. He nodded with his head into the darkness and the fire sang out in his eyes. She stood up and softly walked across the gorse towards the river. The trees on the bank were like masses of intenser dusk. She could hear the river swirling through the naked

alder roots. The sound of it drowned the rustle of the grass against the Breton's boots, but she was aware of his coming with all her body. When he put his hand on her shoulder she turned into him and leaned against his body, her cheek tingling with the feel of his rough flannel shirt and the rise and fall of his breathing.

'You are not an easy woman,' he whispered, 'you do not do this before.'

'Never,' she replied, letting her hand move down his cheek and his neck until it rested on the warm hard flesh of his shoulder. 'But he and I — we are nothing now.'

'Why?' he asked.

She shrugged her shoulders.

'But that is not why I am with you,' she said. Her voice was urgent.

'Why, then?' he asked.

She did not reply. Then she said, 'If my husband wakes, he will kill me.'

He could feel how the tide had set in her. He laughed gutturally and it engulfed them both.

Afterwards, lying under the trees, listening to the water, she was silent.

'Best go back,' he whispered.

She started. 'I had forgotten,' she said, and in a panic, starting up, 'you won't leave me to-morrow, will you?'

He laughed. She heard him plucking the grass. It sounded callous, the sound of taking and not giving.

'To-morrow, yes. I meet my brother in Cardigan after three days.'

'No,' she shuddered, holding him in a passion. He tilted her head back.

'Best to go,' he said, kissing her lips. 'If he finds us —'

There was a rustle in the long grass and he sprang back from her. She did not move, in terror. Then a plop in the water and a rat came swimming downstream. 'Sainte Marie,' he breathed, his voice quivering.

She went back by herself. The gipsy was lying by the dead fire as she had left him, and she slipped past him into the caravan.

She stripped and climbed softly into bed. She put her hand out and touched Micah's naked little body. He wriggled close to her, put his arms round her bosom, and hid his head in her breasts. . . .

The leaves were gold and dancing in the early sun when Micah woke her.

'Come on, mam,' he said, shaking her head. 'You be a cabbage and I'll be a caterpillar and you scream and I eat you.' She sat up.

'Look how fine it is,' she said, her sleepy eyes dazzled with the tossing of light from the leaves on the innumerable blue spear-heads of the sky. Then she remembered the night and sat still. She threw the quilt off and dressed quickly, not wanting her husband to see her naked. Then she went to the door. He had lit the fire; the kettle was singing.

'I was just going to call you,' he said. 'Do some breakfast while I go for a swim.'

'Where's the Johnny Onions?' she asked.

He looked up shrewdly. 'You sound excited,' he said.

She was afraid he had gone. 'I just wanted to know,' she said.

'Well, he's over in the trees,' he replied, smirking, 'doing his business. Send Micah out. I'll take him swimming with me.'

She went into the caravan and lifted Micah out of bed.

'Off with you, snake's body,' she said. He ran out naked into the sunlight. The Breton had come back and he greeted Micah cheerily, holding his arms out, asking the boy to play pig-a-back. Micah shrank away, hanging his head and frowning. The Breton laughed.

'Sulker,' he mocked, pulling his ear. Micah broke loose and ran after his father. The long grass reached to his thighs, as he bobbed like a naked little cupid across the meadow.

'Why are you crying?' his father asked. 'Afraid of the water?'

Micah sniffled.

'What's up, boy?' The gipsy was gentle with him this morning. Micah sat on the bank and shivered. He would not enter the water. His father swam up to him, grasped a willow root, and let the current break in a wave over his back.

'Say, boy, what's the matter?'

Micah's face puckered, angry and fearful.

'That Johnny Onions,' he stammered.

'What's wrong with him?' the gipsy asked.

'He's going to steal mam,' Micah burst out.

The gipsy laughed contemptuously. 'What for would he steal *her*?'

Micah was stung by his laughter. 'He took her away last night,' he said, his voice envenomed.

'Where to?' the gipsy asked.

'Into the meadow,' the boy replied, frightened by his father's wild face. It was terribly ugly and cruel, and smiling, and his eyes all set. The water bubbled against his side and broke over his skin in a little rush of white foam.

'Don't say nothing to mam,' the gipsy said. The tears were trickling down Micah's cheeks and dropping on to his belly and his thighs. The gipsy caught him by the ankle and jerked him into the water.

After breakfast the Breton put the strings of onions on each end of his pole, shouldered it, and stood up to take his leave.

'I remind me always of your goodness,' he said, in his rich, curling voice, and added a few words of patois.

The gipsy got up lazily. 'I'll come with you a bit,' he said. 'I'm going to town to get her ear-rings out of pawn. Come with me?'

'*Volontiers*,' the Breton said, clapping the gipsy's shoulder.

'Let's get some money from the bed first,' the gipsy said.

He entered the caravan. His wife went to the Breton and stood in front of him, very near, rocking a little on her feet.

'You *must* come back,' she said. She was nearly out of her body with longing. The Breton moved back.

'I must go selling to get money,' he said. 'I must get money for my own wife.'

'Wife?' she gasped.

He nodded. 'I have three children.'

She blanched, and then her desire surged back.

'You must come back,' she said, her eyes burning in her.

'Come on, Johnny,' the gipsy called, 'no time to talk.'

'*Tou suite*,' the Breton answered. 'Good-bye, missus. Thank you.'

He turned away and walked through the copse with the gipsy. She could hear the twigs crackling under their feet long after they had gone from sight, and then there was an empty silence. She stood frozen. The tears welled up, turning her desolation to chaos. The day blurred in her sight.

Micah tugged at her skirt. 'He's gone, mam, he's gone.' The boy's voice was jubilant. 'We'll play all the morning, mam, is it?'

She could not stand it any longer. All the dead morning, all the parched afternoon, this tearing ache in her lungs, in her bowels. When her husband returned he would be bound to notice it. If she could be calm for a minute, perhaps she might muzzle her passion, drive it back to its lair. She must have respite from the aching for his hands, for the down on his arms, for the fire of his body and the swooning intimacy of his eyes. She had never burned like this before. Oh God! and the silly cows tugging at the grasses and chewing, chewing. And the standing trees all round. The life in her leaped in a frenzy to be mingled again with the other life. She stood up and walked dizzily along the path through the beeches. Micah was playing in the stream. He saw her go and ran after her frightened. She turned on him.

'Go back,' she blared, 'go back. Tell your father I've gone to Cardigan.'

Micah stood still. Her face wasn't like his mother's. It had no kindness.

He watched her go between the trees. When he realized he was alone he was afraid to move. He stood there, between the beeches, trembling, for a long time. Then he turned, his eyes blurred with tears, and ran in terror to the caravan, up the steps, and into bed. He pulled the quilt over his head and lay in the hollow her body had made. In the dark he unlaced his boots and pushed them over the side of the bed. He pulled her pillow down beside him and stopped weeping.

He woke with a start. His father was bending over him, holding

a candle unsteadily in his hand. A fleck of hot grease fell on his body and he cried aloud.

'Where's she gone?' the gipsy hiccoughed. His breath was sweet, his face haggard. Micah was glad to see him — glad, yet frightened.

'To Cardigan,' he said.

'Cardigan?' the gipsy laughed, rolling his head and laughing till his voice cracked and he fell into a choking cough. 'Cardigan?' He began laughing again, spittle running from his mouth. Micah huddled in the corner by the wall, the quilt drawn up to his chin. The gipsy began singing drunkenly, waving the candle:

'The King of Spain's daughter
Came to visit me,
But I was as dead as dead could be.

'But it's a long way to Cardigan for a lady.' He uncorked a bottle of whisky. 'Just a drop to keep my spirits up till she's back.'

He took a long swig. The blood came into his face with the heat of it and fled again. It seemed to sober him. He sat heavily on the bed.

They sat in silence, the two of them, for hours. The night grew threadbare and grey; the pale, gaunt day came lapping in through the open door. The table, the two chairs, and the cupboard turned from pitch-black pools to sharp silhouettes; as the darkness thinned they took body and colour. The candle stump guttered to a feeble, sulphurous yellow and spluttered out. And both of them sat waiting, saying nothing.

She knew every turn of the road to Cardigan. They worked that way often in the caravan; before her fly-away marriage her father had driven her in every week to shop and market. So she walked without looking at the road, in a great haste. She walked for hours along the dusty white lanes; only when the sun dazzled her eyes did she realize that it was near sunset. She looked about her. There were fifteen odd miles between her and Cardigan. She could never do it without a rest. Her feet were sore and her legs like wet clay. She sat in the dusty hedge and idly fingered a tangle of campion and speedwell. Her stomach was empty and weak and the

gnats gave her no rest. She got up, wearily brushing them off her face and neck, and began walking again. Fifteen miles . . . it wasn't much use. And no money for food. In any case he might not be there for two days. What would she live on till then? And when he did come, what then? He had no money, and he had had his fill of her. She was like a common whore, a mad hatter, looking for a man who didn't want her. She took her shoes off and bathed her swollen feet in a little brook. The water prattled like ice over her toes. She moved them up and down and her body sighed with relief. She took a handful of cress, broke off the roots, washed it, and put it in her mouth. It was cool on her tongue, and yet it burnt her like a remorse. Ever since she had seen the gipsy come out of the cowshed, dusting his knees, she had been helpless in the whirlpool of her mind and body. She saw it clearly, looking down upon herself. She must go back to the caravan. If he had stayed in town overnight, he would never know. And Micah there alone — God! She pulled her sandals on, fingers trembling with haste, and started back along the lane, walking swiftly with a new energy. The night swirled round her, dew-wet, and a stripling moon moved with her. Once she stopped for weariness, slept in the hedge for a little, woke with a start, and went on. Then the road turned from grey to ghostly white and the river gathered the first liquid radiance between its banks. She stripped and slipped into the cold, gleaming water. If he was back, it would be well to have her wits about her. She dressed again, tied her dripping hair, and crossed the last few fields to the caravan. It was very still. How she hoped he had not returned! She climbed softly up the steps. She would slip into bed beside Micah. She screamed.

He stood up, confronting her, his arm upraised. He was chalk-white and unkempt and his eyes were black. He rocked a little on his feet and a filthy grin grew slowly on his face.

'You — whore,' he grunted.

She saw the bottle clenched in his uplifted hand and she laughed.

'Whore!' she said shrilly. 'You're a fine one to call me whore. You creeping swine! Didn't I see you crawl out of the cowshed with that farm girl yesterday? You — my — husband!'

She wasn't frightened now. She was mad with him. If he was going to fight, she was strong, too.

'I'll kill you,' he screamed. She leaped at him. The bottle splintered against the wall and they rolled over, fighting like cats. She was strong, stronger than she had ever been, and his fists did not hurt her. Micah climbed across the bed and ran in terror through the door. He paused in the meadow. He could hear them scuffling and grunting inside. He ran into the wood, out of earshot.

He pummelled her until his arms ached, but she clung to him, her hands locked round his neck, his ankles clasped behind her knees. He was breathless, and suddenly, with a grunt, the fury left him and he relaxed. She lay taut on his body for a minute, then slowly loosed him and lifted herself up on her elbows. His eyes were shut, his cheeks sunken. He had taken another woman. Well, *she* was mistress of him now. And she brushed his curly hair back from his forehead and wiped the sweat from his face. He opened his eyes and saw her face close bending over him.

'You are back, then?' His voice sounded strangely young.

'Yes,' she said, 'yes. Do you want me?'

He took her head in his hands and drew her down to him.

'I always wanted you.' He closed his eyes again. 'I can't understand what happened —'

She covered his mouth with her hand.

'Never mind,' she whispered, 'never mind about that. Let's lie on the bed. It's all right now.'

The gipsy pulled a paper envelope from his pocket, took her cupped hand, and poured the ear-rings into it. She bent naked before the mirror, screwing them into the lobes of her ears and brushing her black hair back.

And when Micah returned an hour later to the caravan, as wary as a weasel for any movement in the terrifying silence, he found them lying face to face on the tousled bed, sleeping. The child did not wake them. Instead, he sat quietly on the steps and carved a whistle out of a sycamore branch, knowing that when they woke everything would be the way he liked it.

First Confession

BY FRANK O'CONNOR

(From *Harper's Bazaar*, New York)

IT was a Saturday afternoon in early spring. A small boy whose face looked as though it had been but newly scrubbed was being led by the hand by his sister through a crowded street. The little boy showed a marked reluctance to proceed; he affected to be very interested in the shop-windows. Equally, his sister seemed to pay no attention to them. She tried to hurry him; he resisted. When she dragged him he began to bawl. The hatred with which she viewed him was almost diabolical, but when she spoke her words and tone were full of passionate sympathy.

'Ah, sha, God help us!' she intoned into his ear in a whine of commiseration.

'Leave me go!' he said, digging his heels into the pavement. 'I don't want to go. I want to go home.'

'But, sure, you can't go home, Jackie. You'll have to go. The parish priest will be up to the house with a stick.'

'I don't care. I won't go.'

'Oh, Sacred Heart, isn't it a terrible pity you weren't a good boy? Oh, Jackie, me heart bleeds for you! I don't know what they'll do to you at all, Jackie, me poor child. And all the trouble you caused your poor old nanny, and the way you wouldn't eat in the same room with her, and the time you kicked her on the shins, and the time you went for me with the bread knife under the table. I don't know will he ever listen to you at all, Jackie. I think meself he might send you to the bishop. Oh, Jackie, how will you think of all your sins?'

Half stupefied with terror, Jackie allowed himself to be led through the sunny streets to the very gates of the church. It was an old one with two grim iron gates and a long, low, shapeless stone

front. At the gates he stuck, but it was already too late. She dragged him behind her across the yard, and the commiserating whine with which she had tried to madden him gave place to a yelp of triumph.

'Now you're caught! Now you're caught. And I hope he'll give you the pinitintial psalms! That'll cure you, you suppurating little caffler!'

Jackie gave himself up for lost. Within the old church there was no stained glass; it was cold and dark and desolate, and in the silence, the trees in the yard knocked hollowly at the tall windows. He allowed himself to be led through the vaulted silence, the intense and magical silence which seemed to have frozen within the ancient walls, buttressing them and shouldering the high wooden roof. In the street outside, yet seeming a million miles away, a ballad singer was drawling a ballad.

Nora sat in front of him beside the confession box. There were a few old women before her, and later a thin, sad-looking man with long hair came and sat beside Jackie. In the intense silence of the church that seemed to grow deeper from the plaintive moaning of the ballad singer, he could hear the buzz-buzz-buzz of a woman's voice in the box, and then the husky ba-ba-ba of the priest's. Lastly the soft thud of something that signalled the end of the confession, and out came the woman, head lowered, hands joined, looking neither to right nor left, and tiptoed up to the altar to say her penance.

It seemed only a matter of seconds till Nora rose and with a whispered injunction disappeared from his sight. He was all alone. Alone and next to be heard and the fear of damnation in his soul. He looked at the sad-faced man. He was gazing at the roof, his hands joined in prayer. A woman in a red blouse and black shawl had taken her place below him. She uncovered her head, fluffed her hair out roughly with her hand, brushed it sharply back, then, bowing, caught it in a knot and pinned it on her neck. Nora emerged. Jackie rose and looked at her with a hatred which was inappropriate to the occasion and the place. Her hands were joined on her stomach, her eyes modestly lowered, and her face had an

expression of the most rapt and tender recollection. With death in his heart he crept into the compartment she left open and drew the door shut behind him.

He was in pitch darkness. He could see no priest or anything else. And anything he had heard of confession got all muddled up in his mind. He knelt to the right-hand wall and said: 'Bless me, father, for I have sinned. This is my first confession.' Nothing happened. He repeated it louder. Still it gave no answer. He turned to the opposite wall, genuflected first, then again went on his knees and repeated the charm. This time he was certain he would receive a reply, but none came. He repeated the process with the remaining wall without effect. He had the feeling of someone with an unfamiliar machine, of pressing buttons at random. And finally the thought struck him that God knew. God knew about the bad confession he intended to make and had made him deaf and blind so that he could neither hear nor see the priest.

Then as his eyes grew accustomed to the blackness, he perceived something he had not noticed previously: a sort of shelf at about the height of his head. The purpose of this eluded him for a moment. Then he understood. It was for kneeling on.

He had always prided himself upon his powers of climbing, but this took it out of him. There was no foothold. He slipped twice before he succeeded in getting his knee on it, and the strain of drawing the rest of his body up was almost more than he was capable of. However, he did at last get his two knees on it, there was just room for those, but his legs hung down uncomfortably and the edge of the shelf bruised his shins. He joined his hands and pressed the last remaining button. 'Bless me, father, for I have sinned. This is my first confession'.

At the same moment the slide was pushed back and a dim light streamed into the little box. There was an uncomfortable silence, and then an alarmed voice asked, 'Who's there?' Jackie found it almost impossible to speak into the grille which was on a level with his knees, but he got a firm grip of the moulding above it, bent his head down and sideways, and as though he were hanging by his feet like a monkey found himself looking almost upside down at the

priest. But the priest was looking sideways at him, and Jackie, whose knees were being tortured by this new position, felt it was a queer way to hear confessions.

'Tis me, father,' he piped, and then, running all his words together in excitement, he rattled off, 'Bless me, father, for I have sinned. This is my first confession.'

'What?' exclaimed a deep and angry voice, and the sombre soutaned figure stood bolt upright, disappearing almost entirely from Jackie's view. 'What does this mean? What are you doing there? Who are you?'

And with the shock Jackie felt his hands lose their grip and his legs their balance. He discovered himself tumbling into space, and, falling, he knocked his head against the door, which shot open and permitted him to thump right into the centre of the aisle. Straight on this came a small, dark-haired priest with a biretta well forward on his head. At the same time Nora came skeltering madly down the church.

'Lord God!' she cried, 'The snivelling little caffler! I knew he'd do it! I knew he'd disgrace me!'

Jackie received a clout over the ear which reminded him that for some strange reason he had not yet begun to cry and that people might possibly think he wasn't hurt at all. Nora slapped him again.

'What's this? What's this?' cried the priest. 'Don't attempt to beat the child, you little vixen!'

'I can't do me pinance with him,' cried Nora shrilly, cocking a shocked eye on the priest. 'He have me driven mad. Stop your crying, you dirty scut! Stop it now or I'll make you cry at the other side of your ugly puss!'

'Run away out of this, you little jade!' growled the priest. He suddenly began to laugh, took out a pocket handkerchief, and wiped Jackie's nose. 'You're not hurt, sure you're not. Show us the ould head . . . Ah, 'tis nothing. 'Twill be better before you're twice married . . . So you were coming to confession?'

'I was, father.'

'A big fellow like you should have terrible sins. Is it your first?'

'Tis, father.'

'Oh, my, worse and worse! Here, sit down there and wait till I get rid of these ould ones and we'll have a long chat. Never mind that sister of yours.'

With a feeling of importance that glowed through his tears Jackie waited. Nora stuck out her tongue at him, but he didn't even bother to reply. A great feeling of relief was welling up in him. The sense of oppression that had been weighing him down for a week, the knowledge that he was about to make a bad confession, disappeared. Bad confession, indeed! He had made friends, made friends with the priest, and the priest expected, even demanded terrible sins. Oh, women! Women! It was all women and girls and their silly talk. They had no real knowledge of the world!

And when the time came for him to make his confession he did not beat about the bush. He may have clenched his hands and lowered his eyes, but wouldn't anyone?

'Father,' he said huskily, 'I made it up to kill me grandmother.'

There was a moment's pause. Jackie did not dare to look up, but he could feel the priest's eyes on him. The priest's voice also seemed a trifle husky.

'Your grandmother?' he asked, but he didn't after all sound very angry.

'Yes, father.'

'Does she live with you?'

'She do, father.'

'And why did you want to kill her?'

'Oh, God, father, she's a horrible woman!'

'Is she now?'

'She is, father.'

'What way is she horrible?'

Jackie paused to think. It was hard to explain.

'She takes snuff, father.'

'Oh, my!'

'And she goes round in her bare feet, father.'

'Tut-tut-tut!'

'She's a horrible woman, father,' said Jackie with sudden earnestness. 'She takes porter. And she ates the potatoes off the table with her hands. And me mother do be out working most days, and since that one came 'tis she gives us ~~our~~ dinner and I can't ate the dinner.' He found himself sniffing. 'And she gives pinnies to Nora and she doesn't give no pinnies to me because she knows I can't stand her. And me father sides with her, father, and he bates me, and me heart is broken and wan night in bed I made it up the way I'd kill her.'

Jackie began to sob again, rubbing his nose with his sleeve, as he remembered his wrongs.

'And what way were you going to kill her?' asked the priest smoothly.

'With a hatchet, father.'

'When she was in bed?'

'No, father.'

'How, so?'

'When she ates the potatoes and drinks the porter she falls asleep, father.'

'And you'd hit her then?'

'Yes, father.'

'Wouldn't a knife be better?'

'Twould, father, only I'd be afraid of the blood.'

'Oh, of course. I never thought of the blood.'

'I'd be afraid of that, father. I was near hitting Nora with the bread knife one time she came after me under the table, only I was afraid.'

'You're a terrible child,' said the priest with awe.

'I am, father,' said Jackie noncommittally, sniffing back his tears.

'And what would you do with the body?'

'How, father?'

'Wouldn't someone see her and tell?'

'I was going to cut her up with a knife and take away the pieces and bury them. I could get an orange box for threepence and make a cart to take them away.'

'My, my,' said the priest. 'You had it all well planned.'

'Ah, I tried that,' said Jackie with mounting confidence. 'I borrowed a cart and practised it by meself one night after dark.'

'And weren't you afraid?'

'Ah, no,' said Jackie half-heartedly. 'Only a bit.'

'You have terrible courage,' said the priest. 'There's a lot of people I want to get rid of, but I'm not like you. I'd never have the courage. And hanging is an awful death.'

'Is it?' asked Jackie, responding to the brightness of a new theme.

'Oh, an awful blooming death!'

'Did you ever see a fellow hanged?'

'Dozens of them, and they all died roaring.'

'Jay!' said Jackie.

'They do be swinging out of them for hours and the poor fellows lepping and roaring, like bells in a belfry, and then they put lime on them to burn them up. Of course, they pretend they're dead, but sure, they don't be dead at all.'

'Jay!' said Jackie again.

'So if I were you I'd take my time and think about it. In my opinion 'tisin't worth it, not even to get rid of a grandmother. I asked dozens of fellows like you that killed their grandmothers about it, and they all said, no, 'twasn't worth it. . . .'

Nora was waiting in the yard. The sunlight struck down on her across the high wall and its brightness made his eyes dazzle. 'Well?' she asked. 'What did he give you?'

'Three Hail Marys.'

'You mustn't have told him anything.'

'I told him everything,' said Jackie confidently.

'What did you tell him?'

'Things you don't know.'

'Bah! He gave you three Hail Marys because you were a cry baby!'

Jackie didn't mind. He felt the world was very good. He began to whistle as well as the hindrance in his jaw permitted.

'What are you sucking?'

'Bull's eyes.'

'Was it he gave them to you?'

"'Twas.'

'Almighty God!' said Nora. 'Some people have all the luck. I might as well be a sinner like you. There's no use in being good.'

The Saint

BY V. S. PRITCHETT

(From *Horizon*)

WHEN I was seventeen years old I lost my religious faith. It had been unsteady for some time and then, very suddenly, it went as the result of an incident in a punt on the river outside the town where we lived. My father was a small furniture manufacturer in the place, always in difficulties about money but convinced that in some way God would help him. And this happened. An investor arrived who belonged to a sect called the Church of the Last Purification of Toronto, Canada. Could we imagine, this man asked, a good and omnipotent God allowing his children to be short of money? We had to admit we could not imagine this. The man paid in the money and we were converted. Our family were the first Purifiers — as they were called — in the town. Soon a congregation of fifty or more were meeting every Sunday in a room at the Corn Exchange.

At once we found ourselves isolated and hated people. Everyone made jokes about us. We had to stand together because we were sometimes dragged into the courts. What the unconverted could not forgive in us was first that we believed in successful prayer and, secondly, that our revelation came from Toronto. The success of our prayers had a simple foundation. We regarded it as 'Error' — our name for Evil — to believe the evidence of our senses, and if we had influenza or consumption, or had lost our money or were unemployed, we denied the reality of these things, saying that since God could not have made them they therefore did not exist. It was exhilarating to look at our congregation and to know that what the vulgar would call miracles were performed among us, almost as a matter of routine, every day. Not very big miracles, perhaps; but up in London and out in Toronto, we knew that deafness and blind-

ness, cancer and insanity, the great scourges, were constantly vanishing before the prayers of the more advanced Purifiers.

'What!' said my schoolmaster, an Irishman with eyes like broken glass and a sniff of irritability in the bristles of his nose. 'What! do you have the impudence to tell me that if you fell off the top floor of this building and smashed your head in, you would say you hadn't fallen and were not injured?'

I was a small boy and very afraid of everybody, but not when it was a question of my religion. I was used to the kind of conundrum the Irishman had set.

'I *would* say so,' I replied with coldness and some vanity, 'and my head would not be smashed.'

'You would not say so,' answered the Irishman. 'You would not say so.' His eyes sparkled with pure pleasure. 'You'd be dead.'

The boys laughed, but they looked at me with admiration.

Then, I do not know how or why, I began to see a difficulty. Without warning, and as if I had gone into my bedroom at night and had found a gross ape seated in my bed and thereafter following me about with his grunts and his fleas and a look relentless and ancient scored on his brown face, I was faced with the problem which prowls at the centre of all religious faith. I was faced by the difficulty of the origin of evil. It was an illusion, we were taught. But even illusions have an origin. The Purifiers denied this.

I consulted my father. Trade was bad at the time, and this made his faith peremptory. He frowned as I spoke.

'When did you brush your coat last?' he said. 'You're getting slovenly about your appearance. If you spent more time studying the books' — that is to say, the Purification literature — 'and less with your hands in your pockets and playing about with boats on the river, you wouldn't be letting Error in.'

All dogmas have their jargon; my father as a business man loved the trade terms of the Purification. 'Don't let Error in' was a favourite one. The whole point about the Purification, he said, was that it was scientific and therefore exact; in consequence it was sheer weakness to admit discussion. Indeed, betrayal. He unpinched his pince-nez, stirred his tea, and indicated I must submit

or change the subject. Preferably the latter. I saw, to my alarm, that my arguments had defeated my father. Faith and doubt pulled like strings round my throat.

'You don't mean to say you don't believe that what our Lord said was true?' my mother asked nervously, following me out of the room. 'Your dad does, dear.'

I could not answer. I went out of the house and down the main street to the river, where the punts were stuck like insects in the summery flash of the reach. Life was a dream, I thought; no, a nightmare, for the ape was beside me.

I was still in this state, half sulking and half exalted, when Mr. Hubert Timberlake came to the town. He was one of the important people from the headquarters of our church, and he had come to give an address on the Purification at the Corn Exchange. Posters announcing this were everywhere. Mr. Timberlake was to spend Sunday afternoon with us. It was unbelievable that a man so eminent would actually sit in our dining-room, use our knives and forks, and eat our food. Every imperfection in our home and our characters would jump out at him. The Truth had been revealed to man with scientific accuracy — an accuracy we could all test by experiment — and the future course of human development on earth was laid down, with finality. And here in Mr. Timberlake was a man who had not merely performed many miracles — even, as it was said, with proper reserve, having twice raised the dead — but who had actually been to Toronto, our headquarters, where this great and revolutionary revelation had first been given.

'This is my son,' my father said, introducing me. 'He thinks, he thinks, Mr. Timberlake, but I tell him he only thinks he does, ha, ha.' My father was a humorous man. 'He's always on the river,' my father continued. 'I tell him he's got water on the brain. I've been telling Mr. Timberlake about you, my boy.'

A hand as soft as the best-quality chamois leather took mine. I saw a wide upright man in a double-breasted navy blue suit. He had a pink square head with very small ears and one of those torpid, enamelled smiles which were so common in our sect.

'Why, isn't that just fine?' said Mr. Timberlake dryly. Owing

to his contacts with Toronto he spoke with an American accent. 'What say we tell your father it's funny he thinks he's funny?'

The eyes of Mr. Timberlake were direct and colourless. He had the look of a retired merchant captain who had become decontaminated from the sea and had reformed and made money. His defence of me had made me his at once. My doubts vanished. Whatever Mr. Timberlake believed must be true, and as I listened to him at lunch I thought there could be no finer life than his.

'I expect Mr. Timberlake's tired after his address,' said my mother.

'Tired?' exclaimed my father, brilliant with indignation. 'How can Mr. Timberlake be tired? Don't let Error in!'

For the merely inconvenient in our faith was just as illusory as a great catastrophe would have been, if you wished to be strict, and Mr. Timberlake's presence made us so.

I noticed then that, after their broad smiles, Mr. Timberlake's lips had the habit of setting into a long, depressed, sarcastic curve.

'I guess,' he drawled, 'I guess the Almighty must have been tired sometimes, for it says He relaxed on the seventh day. Say, do you know what I'd like to do this afternoon?' he said, turning to me. 'While your father and mother are sleeping off this loin of pork let's you and me go on the river and get water on the brain. I'll show you how to punt.'

Mr. Timberlake, I saw to my disappointment, was out to show he understood the young. I saw he was planning 'a quiet talk' with me about my problems.

'There are too many people on the river on Sundays,' said my father uneasily.

'Oh, I like a crowd,' said Mr. Timberlake, giving my father a tough look. 'This is the day of rest, you know.' He had had my father gobbling up every bit of gossip from the sacred city of Toronto all the morning.

My parents were incredulous that a man like Mr. Timberlake should go out among the blazers and gramophones of the river on a Sunday afternoon. In any other member of our church they thought this would be sin.

'Waal, what say?' said Mr. Timberlake. I could only murmur.

'That's fixed,' said Mr. Timberlake. And on came the smile as simple, vivid, and unanswerable as the smile on an advertisement. 'Isn't that just fine!'

Mr. Timberlake went upstairs to wash his hands. My father was deeply offended and shocked, but he could say nothing. He unpinched his glasses.

'A very wonderful man,' he said. 'So human,' he apologized.

'My boy,' my father said, 'this is going to be an experience for you. Hubert Timberlake was making a thousand a year in the insurance business ten years ago. Then he heard of the Purification. He threw everything up, just like that. He gave up his job and took up the work. It was a struggle, he told me so himself this morning. "Many's the time," he said to me this morning, "when I wondered where my next meal was coming from." But the way was shown. He came down from Worcester to London and in two years he was making fifteen hundred a year out of his practice.'

To heal the sick by prayer according to the tenets of the Church of the Last Purification was Mr. Timberlake's profession.

My father lowered his eyes. With his glasses off the lids were small and uneasy. He lowered his voice too.

'I have told him about your little trouble,' my father said quietly with emotion. I was burned with shame. My father looked up and stuck out his chin confidently.

'He just simply smiled,' my father said. 'That's all.'

Then we waited for Mr. Timberlake to come down.

I put on white flannels at my father's request, and soon I was walking down to the river with Mr. Timberlake. I felt that I was going with him under false pretences; for he would begin explaining to me the origin of evil and I would have to pretend politely that he was converting me when already, at the first sight of him, I had believed. A stone bridge, whose two arches seem like an owlish pair of eyes gazing up the reach, crosses the river at the landing stage, and I thought as I got the tickets for our punt that it was a pity the flannelled men and the sunburned girls there did not know that this man in the navy-blue suit, the bowler hat, and

the brown boots was *the* Mr. Timberlake who had been speaking in the town that very morning. I looked round for him, and when I saw him I was a little startled. He was standing at the edge of the water looking at it with an expression of empty incomprehension. Among the white crowds his air of brisk efficiency had gone. He looked middle-aged, lonely, and insignificant. But the smile switched on when he saw me. He was God's sales manager once more.

'Ready?' he called. 'Fine!'

I had the feeling that inside him there must be a gramophone record that went round and round inside him, stopping at that word.

He stepped into the punt and at once took charge.

'Now I want you to paddle us over to the far bank,' he said, 'and then I'll show you how to punt.'

Everything that Mr. Timberlake said still seemed unreal to me. The fact that he was sitting in a punt, of all commonplace material things, was incredible. That he should propose to pole us up the river was terrifying. Suppose he fell into the river? At once I checked the thought. A leader of our church under the direct guidance of God could not possibly fall into the river.

The stream is wide and deep in this reach, but on the southern bank there is a manageable depth and a hard bottom. Over the clay banks the willows hang, making their basketwork print of sun and shadow on the water, while under the gliding boat lie cloudy, chloride caverns. The hoop-like branches of the trees bend down until their tips touch the water like fingers, making musical sounds. Ahead in midstream, on a day sunny as this one was, there is a path of strong light which is hard to look at unless you half-close your eyes, and down this path on the crowded Sundays go the launches with their parasols and their pennants, and also the rowing boats with their beetle-leg oars which seem to dig the sunlight out of the water as they rise. Upstream one goes, on and on, between gardens and then between fields kept for grazing. On the afternoon when Mr. Timberlake and I went out to settle the question of the origin of evil, the meadows were packed densely with buttercups.

'Now,' said Mr. Timberlake decisively, when I had paddled to the other side, 'now I'll take her.'

He got over the seat into the well at the stern.

'I'll just get you clear of the trees,' I said.

'Give me the pole,' said Mr. Timberlake, standing up on the little platform and making a squeak with his boots as he did so. 'Thank you, sir. I haven't done this for eighteen years, but I can tell you, my lord, in those days I was considered some poler.'

He looked around and let the pole slide down through his hands. Then he gave the first, difficult push. The punt rocked pleasantly and we moved forward. I sat facing him, paddle in hand, to check any inward drift of the punt.

'How's that, you guys?' said Mr. Timberlake, looking round at our eddies and drawing in the pole. The water sished down it.

'Fine,' I said. Deferentially I had caught the word.

He went on to his second and third strokes, taking too much water on his sleeve, perhaps, and uncertain in his steering, which I corrected, but he was doing well.

'It comes back to me,' he said. 'How am I doing?'

'Just keep her out from the trees,' I said.

'The trees?' he asked.

'The willows,' I replied.

'I'll do it now,' he said. 'How's that? Not quite enough? Well, how's this?'

'Another one,' I said. 'The current runs strong this side.'

'What? More trees?' he exclaimed. He was getting hot.

'We can shoot out past them,' I answered. 'I'll ease us over with the paddle.'

Mr. Timberlake did not like this suggestion.

'No, don't do that. I can manage it,' he said.

I did not want to offend one of the leaders of our church, so I put the paddle down; but I felt I ought to have taken him farther along, away from the irritation of the trees.

'Of course,' I said, 'we could go under them. It might be nice.'

'I think,' said Mr. Timberlake, 'that would be a very good idea, my lord.'

He lunged hard on the pole and took us towards the next archway of willow branches.

'We may have to duck a bit, that's all,' I said.

'Oh, I can push the branches up,' replied Mr. Timberlake.

'It is better to duck,' I said.

We were gliding now quickly towards the arch; in fact I was already under it.

'I think I should duck,' I said. 'Just bend down for this one.'

'What makes the trees lean over the water like this?' asked Mr. Timberlake. 'Weeping willows — I'll give you a thought there. How Error likes to make us dwell on sorrow. Why not call them *laughing* willows?' discoursed Mr. Timberlake as the branch passed over my head.

'Duck,' I said.

'Where? I don't see them,' said Mr. Timberlake, turning round.

'No, your head,' I said. 'The branch,' I called.

'Oh, the branch. This one?' said Mr. Timberlake, finding a branch just against his chest, and he put out a hand to lift it. It is not easy to lift a willow branch, and Mr. Timberlake was surprised. He stepped back as it gently and firmly leaned against him. He leaned back and pushed from his feet. And he pushed too far. The boat went on. I saw Mr. Timberlake's boots leave the stern as he took an unthoughtful step backwards. He made a last-minute grab at a stronger and higher branch; and then, there he hung a yard above the water, round as a blue damson that is ripe and ready, waiting only for a touch to make it fall. Too late with the paddle and shot ahead by the force of his thrust, I could not save him.

For a full minute I did not believe what I saw; indeed our religion taught us not to believe what we saw. Unbelieving, I could not move. I gaped. The impossible had happened. Only a miracle, I found myself saying, could save him.

What was most striking was the silence of Mr. Timberlake as he hung from the bough. I was lost between gazing at him and trying to get the punt out of the small branches of the tree. By the time I had got the punt out there were several yards of water between

us and the soles of his boots were very near the water as the branch bent under his weight. Boats were passing at the time, but no one seemed to notice us. I was glad about this. This was a private agony. The face of Mr. Timberlake was thickened but not em-purpled, and it was squeezed between his shoulders and his hanging arms. I saw him blink and look up at the sky. His eyelids were pale like a chicken's. He was tidy and dignified as he hung there, the hat was not displaced and the top button of his coat was done up. He had a blue silk handkerchief in his breast pocket. So unperturbed and genteel he seemed that as the tips of his shoes came nearer and nearer to the water, I became alarmed. He could perform what are called miracles. He would be thinking at this moment that only in an erroneous and illusory sense was he hanging from the branch of the tree over six feet of water. He was probably praying one of the closely reasoned prayers of our faith which were more like conversations with Euclid than with God. The calm of his face suggested this. Was he (I asked myself) within sight of the main road, the town Recreation Ground, and the landing stage crowded with people, was he about to re-enact a well-known miracle? I hoped that he was not. I prayed that he was not. I prayed with all my will that Mr. Timberlake would not walk upon the water. It was my prayer and not his that was answered.

I saw the shoes dip, the water rise above his ankles and up his socks. He tried to move his grip now to a yet higher branch — he did not succeed — and in making this effort his coat and waistcoat rose and parted from his trousers. A seam of shirt with its pant loops and brace tabs broke like a crack across the middle of Mr. Timberlake. It was like a fatal flaw in a statue, an earthquake crack which made the monumental mortal. The last Greeks must have felt as I felt then when they saw a split across the middle of some statue of Apollo. It was at this moment that I realized that the final revelation about man and society on earth had come to nobody and that Mr. Timberlake knew nothing at all about the origin of evil.

All this takes long to describe, but it happened in a few seconds

as I paddled towards him. I was too late to get his feet on the boat, and the only thing to do was to let him sink until his hands were nearer the level of the punt and then to get him to change hand holds. Then I would paddle him ashore. I did this. Amputated by the water, first a torso, then a bust, then a mere head and shoulders, Mr. Timberlake, I noticed, looked sad and lonely as he sank. He was a declining dogma. As the water lapped his collar — for he hesitated to let go of the branch to hold the punt — I saw a small triangle of deprecation and pathos between his nose and the corners of his mouth. The head resting on the platter of water had the sneer of calamity on it, such as one sees in the pictures of a beheaded saint.

‘Hold on to the punt, Mr. Timberlake,’ I said urgently. ‘Hold on to the punt.’

He did so.

‘Push from behind,’ he directed in a dry, businesslike voice. They were his first words. I obeyed him.

Carefully I paddled him towards the bank. He turned and, with a splash, climbed ashore. There he stood, raising his arms and looking at the water running down his swollen suit and making a puddle at his feet.

‘Say,’ said Mr. Timberlake coldly. ‘We let some Error in that time.’

How much he must have hated our family.

‘I am sorry, Mr. Timberlake,’ I said. ‘I am most awfully sorry. I should have paddled. It was my fault. I’ll get you home at once. Let me wring out your coat and waistcoat. You’ll catch your death —’

I stopped. I had nearly blasphemed. I had nearly suggested that Mr. Timberlake had fallen into the water and that to a man of his age this might be dangerous.

Mr. Timberlake corrected me. His voice was impersonal, addressing the laws of human existence rather than myself.

‘If God made water it would be ridiculous to suggest He made it capable of harming his other creatures. Wouldn’t it?’

‘Yes,’ I murmured hypocritically.

'O.K.,' said Mr. Timberlake. 'Let's go.'

'I'll soon get you across,' I said.

'No,' he said, 'I mean let's go on. We're not going to let a little thing like this spoil a beautiful afternoon. Where were we going? You spoke of a pretty landing place farther on. Let's go there.'

'But I must take you home. You can't sit there soaked to the skin. It will spoil your clothes.'

'Now, now,' said Mr. Timberlake, 'do as I say. Go on.'

There was nothing to be done with him. I held the punt in to the bank and he stepped in. He sat like a bursting and sodden bolster in front of me while I paddled. We had lost the pole, of course.

For a long time I could hardly look at Mr. Timberlake. He was taking the line that nothing had happened, and this put me at a disadvantage. I knew something considerable had happened. That glaze, which so many of the members of our sect had on their faces and persons, their minds and manners, had been washed off. There was no gleam for me from Mr. Timberlake.

'What's that house over there?' he asked. He was making conversation. I had steered into the middle of the river to get him into the strong sun. I saw steam rise from him.

I took courage and studied him. He was a man, I realized, in poor physical condition, unexercised and sedentary. I remember he had said at lunch:

'A young woman I know said, "Isn't it wonderful! I can walk thirty miles a day without being in the least tired." I said, "I do not see that bodily indulgence is anything a member of the Church of the Last Purification should boast about."'

Yes, there was something flaccid, passive, and slack about Mr. Timberlake. Bunched in swollen clothes, he refused to take them off. It came to me, as he looked with boredom at the water, the passing boats, and the country, that he had not been in the country before. That it was something he had agreed to do but wanted to get over quickly. He was totally uninterested. By his questions — What is that church? Are there any fish in this river? Is that a wireless or a gramophone? — I understood that Mr. Timberlake was politely and formally acknowledging a world he did not live in.

It was too interesting, too eventful. His spirit, inert and preoccupied, was elsewhere in an eventless and immaterial habitation. He was a dull man, duller than any man I have ever known; but this dullness was a sort of earthly deposit left by a being whose mind was engrossed in abstract matters. There was a slightly pettish look on his face as (to himself, of course) he declared he was not wet and that he would not catch pneumonia.

Mr. Timberlake spoke little. Sometimes he squeezed water out of his sleeve. He shivered a little. He watched his steam. I had planned when we set out to go up as far as the lock, but now the thought of another two miles of this responsibility was too much. I pretended I wanted to go only as far as the bend which we were approaching, where one of the richest buttercup meadows was. I mentioned this to him. He turned and looked with boredom at the field. Slowly we came to the bank.

We tied up the punt and we landed.

'Fine,' said Mr. Timberlake. He stood at the edge of the meadow just as he had stood at the landing stage — lost, stupefied, uncomprehending.

'Nice to stretch our legs,' I said. I led the way into the deep flowers. So dense were the buttercups there was hardly any green. Presently I sat down. Mr. Timberlake looked at me and sat down also. Then I turned to him with a last try at persuasion. Respectability, I was sure, was his trouble.

'No one will see us,' I said. 'This is out of sight of the river. Take off your coat and trousers and wring them out.'

Mr. Timberlake replied firmly.

'I am satisfied to remain as I am.'

'What is this flower?' he asked, to change the subject.

'Buttercup,' I said.

'Of course,' he replied.

I could do nothing with him. I lay down full length in the sun and, observing this and thinking to please me, Mr. Timberlake did the same. He must have supposed that this was what I had come out in the boat to do. It was only human. He had come out with me, I saw, to show that he was human.

But as we lay there I saw the steam still rising. I had had enough.

'A bit hot,' I said, getting up.

He got up at once.

'Do you want to sit in the shade?' he asked politely.

'No,' I said. 'Would you like to?'

'No,' he said. 'I was thinking of you.'

'Let's go back,' I said. We both stood up and I let him pass in front of me. When I looked at him again I stopped dead. Mr. Timberlake was no longer a man in a navy blue suit. He was blue no longer. He was transfigured. He was yellow. He was covered with buttercup pollen, a fine yellow paste of it made by the damp, from head to foot.

'Your suit,' I said.

He looked at it. He raised his thin eyebrows a little, but he did not smile or make any comment.

The man is a saint, I thought. As saintly as any of those gold-leaf figures in the churches of Sicily. Golden he sat in the punt; golden he sat for the next hour as I paddled him down the river. Golden and bored. Golden as we landed at the town and as we walked up the street back to my parents' house. There he refused to change his clothes or to sit by a fire. He kept an eye on the time for his train back to London. By no word did he acknowledge the disasters or the beauties of the world. If they were printed upon him it was as upon a husk.

Sixteen years have passed since I dropped Mr. Timberlake in the river and since the sight of his pant loops destroyed my faith. I have not seen him since, and to-day I heard that he was dead. He was fifty-seven. His mother, a very old lady with whom he had lived all his life, went into his bedroom when he was getting ready for church and found him lying on the floor in his shirtsleeves. A stiff collar with the tie half inserted was in one hand. Five minutes before, she told the doctor, she had been speaking to him.

The doctor who looked at the heavy body lying on the single bed saw a middle-aged man, wide rather than stout, and with an extraordinarily broad, box-like, thick-jawed face. He had got fat, my father told me, in later years. The heavy liver-coloured cheeks

were like the chaps of a hound. Heart disease, it was plain, was the cause of the death of Mr. Timberlake. In death the face was wax, even coarse and degenerate. It was a miracle, the doctor said, that he had lived as long. Any time during the last twenty years a sudden shock might have killed him.

I thought of our afternoon on the river. I thought of him hanging from the tree. I thought of him, indifferent and golden, in the meadow. I understood why he had made for himself a protective, sedentary blandness, an automatic smile, a collection of phrases. He kept them on like the coat after his ducking. And I understood why — though I had feared it all the time we were on the river — I understood why he did not talk to me about the origin of evil. He was honest. The ape was with us. The ape that merely followed me was already inside Mr. Timberlake eating at his heart.

The Coat

BY HENRY HANDEL RICHARDSON

(From *Good Housekeeping*, London)

THE train was late, and she shifted uneasily from foot to foot as she stood, the coat clinging and dragging like the water-logged clothes on a drowning man. For the weather had done one of its perverse changes, the November morning broken sunny and mild. Just her luck: yesterday she could have worn the wretched thing in comfort. Now, the mere thought of what lay before her — the trapesing to and fro, the crowded buses, the overheated shops — exhausted her.

But there, thank goodness, came the train, slithering round the bend like a sly brown serpent. And before it fairly stopped the windows were black with heads, carriage-doors flew open, porters shouted and were shouted for, bags and cases tumbled out. She had posted herself much too far down; had to trudge almost the length of the platform before she found Margaret, standing stolid and composed amid the racket. Just the same old sobersides. The same old face, too: nature unadorned, not a touch of make-up: country from hat to shoes. One felt very chic and towny¹ by comparison; and as the two of them moved to join the tail of the crowd at the gates, she saw to it that the skirts of the coat swayed becomingly.

More than once she thought she felt Margaret eyeing her, but, 'So good of you, Katherine, to undertake to pilot me round,' was all that was said. Or (ridiculously): 'Even to crunch the London soot underfoot is a treat.' And when they were out of the station, through the arch and on their way to the bus, there was nothing for it but herself to focus the other's wandering attention.

'What do you think of my coat?'

'Oh, er . . . very nice, very nice indeed. But isn't it rather heavy for such a warm day?'

'Oh, dear, no. Fur of *this* quality is never heavy.' And as Margaret's sole response was an agreeable smile: 'It was a present from Harry, you see. On my last birthday. He paid a ruinous price for it -- he's a regular spendthrift where I'm concerned.'

'Really? And so it has been a great success -- your marriage?'

This time she, too, contented herself with smiling.

'I hope I'm to be allowed to meet him?'

'Yes, he has promised to join us for lunch.'

Glibly she brought out the falsehood. But, a strenuous morning's shopping over -- the sums she had to sit by and see spent! For the plainer and dowdier the clothes, the more it seemed they cost. And only the best of everything was good enough. The 'ruinous price' attributed to Harry began to give her qualms. And in the shoe-shop she took care to keep her own feet out of sight -- no Harry met them.

At midday, then, they sat alone at their table in the restaurant of a great store.

'It looks as if he hadn't been able to get off. He's quite an important person in the office nowadays, you know.'

'Splendid. Perhaps he'll rise to the head of it before he's done. There's nothing like a steady climb, is there? So much the most satisfactory way.'

Oh, this harping on Harry! And even here, where the air was thick with heat and food, she dared do no more than loosen a button at her throat, while she sat and listened to Margaret poke and pry. An inquisitive old maid, that was what the past three years had turned *her* into.

'No children?'

What next! 'Good Lord, no! Harry's much too considerate. You've no *idea* what an old silly he is about me. When I scolded him for buying such a coat, all he said was, "It ought to have been mink." ' And with a forced smile over the choke of the collar: 'Next year I'm to have a car. One of the best on the road.'

Was she laying it on too thick? (*Could* her shoes have been spotted?) Or did she only imagine the dryness, the lack of acceptance, in Margaret's steady gaze? Anyhow, real or not, the suspicion

was enough to give her pause. In a flurry she snatched up bag and gloves.

'I think . . . if you've quite finished? For it looks to me as if it's going to turn foggy. That's the danger of such fine mornings at this time of year.' (The danger, too, that trains might not run, and she be forced to take Margaret home with her. Oh, *anything* but that! The 'charming bungalow,' the 'spacious garden.')

Outside, they had to cross the road, and at once there was a muddle. Still rattled, she stepped off the pavement just as the lights changed, and Margaret wasn't sharp enough. (You had to be a Londoner to take chances.) To see what the fool was doing she turned her head, and a bus chose just that moment to swing round the corner and come charging down on her. Anything more appalling than the nearness of this scarlet monster . . . like a house got loose, a moving mountain . . . She had to jump for her life, blindly, desperately: but jump she did, with a nimbleness that amazed her, clogged as she was: and the next instant found herself safe on the opposite pavement. But someone hadn't been so lucky: there was a hideous shriek, a chorus of grinding brakes, shouts, cries, wildest confusion. God! Where was Margaret? That hat, she would have known it anywhere. But not a trace, not a speck of its ludicrous cock's plume, in the crowd that ran together like fowls after food. She tried to call out; but no voice came. And even if it *was* Margaret, she couldn't go back. Accidents terrified her, the sight of blood turned her sick. And so, palsied with fear, her heart pounding fit to split her chest, she stood and watched the traffic pile up, policemen spring from the earth, the crush thicken, everyone pushing and shoving to catch a glimpse of what lay in the road. Then, the bell of an ambulance, which, still walled in by people, loaded its fearful burden and drove off. Whereupon the crowd thinned and melted. But still no Margaret beckoned to her or came over to join her. Finding her voice, she turned to a man who stood by and asked if he could tell her who had been hurt. But he didn't seem to hear her. A kind-faced woman, however, gave her an odd look and a smile in passing, and, without being asked, said gently: 'It's all over. Don't be frightened.'

Frightened? Fright was the least of it. For what now? — now that, thanks to another's imbecility, she had been landed in this hole. (Oh, that she had never set eyes on Margaret!) Now, she would need to go to a policeman, allege faintness, say she missed her friend; hear to which hospital the ambulance had driven, make her way there, listen to gruesome details, perhaps even see and identify the body. Horrible indeed: but it wasn't this that made her shiver and quake. And, while she put a hand to her jaw, to stop its chattering, her brain fumbled with thoughts of escape. Nobody here had known she was to meet Margaret; at this end she was safe. But down in the country, at Margaret's home, a letter might be found bearing her name. If she did not come forward she would probably be broadcast or advertised for . . . oh God, oh God!

Insensibly, however, she had begun to walk away: to follow, as if drawn, in the direction of the ambulance. And here she was in Portland Place. Or so she supposed. For sure enough fog *had* come down, filling the eyes, throwing a haze over streets and people, muffling the tall buildings till you couldn't tell one from another. Still she plodded on, in growing bewilderment: the coat alone remaining true to itself and making a labour of each step.

A seat! . . . a seat. She hailed it with a relief that went up like a prayer of thanks. Never had anything come so opportunistically. Alone, too, and fog-screened, she could at last unbutton the coat. And this she did, throwing it wide from neck to hem, drinking in deep, luscious breaths of air; if air it could be called.

But not for long was she alone. A figure took shape in the murk and turned to a man, who sat down beside her. She edged away; for he didn't look much, and she had her fur to think of.

Now, he was actually speaking, asking if she had lost herself.

Of him she made short work. 'Certainly not. I'm just taking a rest.'

'And the fog will gradually lift.'

'Let us hope so.' She meant to leave it at that, but found herself adding: 'What I *have* lost is the friend I came out with.'

'Can I help you?'

'You? How, I'd like to know!'

'Well, if you would perhaps remove your coat —'

Aha! So that was what he was: a coat thief. She had read of such things happening under cover of fog. Hurrily she re-did her fastenings. If he was after the coat he'd have to take her too. And she was tall and strong.

But he made no move to attack her. And again some inner urge forced her to go on speaking.

'The very idea of me sitting here without it! I should be much too . . . 'bare' was the word that presented itself, but she choked it back, it sounded so odd, and said 'cold' instead, though she was perspiring freely.

'As you will,' said the man. And evidently took the hint; for when she looked round next he had gone.

Fool, oh, fool, she with her suspicions! After all, he might have known, have been able to tell her what it would be best to do. She raised her handkerchief to her smarting eyes; and as she lowered it saw another figure growing as it were out of the mist: a woman this time, so no cause for alarm. But the be-stringed bonnet, the antiquated mantle, *could* only belong to a charwoman or some such person; and again she made to edge away. But was brought up by the end of the seat. And the new-comer plumped down almost on top of her.

Thus wedged in she had to listen to the same fatuous question.

'Can I help you?'

What the hell did they mean by it, all of them? (The next one that came along she'd be beforehand with.) And her reply was as crushing as she knew how to make it.

But a glance shot sideways, to see how the creature took the snubbing, froze the words on her tongue. Round-eyed, open-mouthed, she wrenched herself loose, to turn, to make sure.

'*Mother!* — you? What on earth are *you* doing here? In this fog, with your rheumatism? You'll be ill again, you'll be laid up!'

'Don't worry about me, my dear. It's you we have to think of.'

Which was mother to the life. Always ready to belittle herself and her ailments.

'Well, I must say! But oh, it seems too good to be true. For you're just the person I need. I'm in such trouble, mother, such

terrible trouble!' And breathlessly she poured out her tale: the accident, her own lucky escape, her fears for Margaret, her laming uncertainty.

Except for a gentle click or two of the tongue, she was listened to in silence. But when she stopped speaking, in place of the expected sympathy, the sound, motherly advice, all she heard was: 'But first take off your coat.'

And that was like the stab of the drill on an inflamed nerve.

'Oh, *curse* the coat! Can't you any of you leave it alone? Besides, I never heard such nonsense. How can I possibly take it off? I should be much too —' Again she had to fight an impulse to say something she didn't want to, or mean.

'You needn't mind being bare before me, little Katie.'

There! — the word was out, and said not by her but another.

Though staggered, she managed a mocking laugh. 'Bare? It sounds as if I had nothing on underneath. But "little Katie" — how good that sounds! No one has called me Katie since . . . *since* —' The fraction of a second in which her heart stood still, and she was on her feet, her balled fists digging into her cheeks, her eyes wild with fear, all the blood in her body galloping back to her heart.

'*Mother! You?* But — but how can it be? For you're dead, mother — *dead!* — and have been for years and years.'

'I will explain.'

'Explain? Explain *that?* Oh Christ, what does it mean? Am I going mad?' Her legs abruptly failing her, she fell face downward on the seat, crying and sobbing.

'Quiet, child, quiet. But come now.' And by some means or other the coat was undone, loosened, pulled off her: bringing to light, in all its meanness, the shabby, out-of-date dress that was her sole wear. She shivered into herself as though she had been stripped naked. And yet . . . rid of the coat's intolerable drag, the fug of it, the stickiness . . . Now, she could move, sit up with ease, turn her head, look about her. For the man had been right; the fog *was* lifting, had shrunk to mere whiffs and puffs of mist in the upper air. But — this was not Portland Place. No old Lister with his

sideboards, no rows of cars and taxis. Nor houses either: just a wide, open, desolate space, with a single seat planked down in the middle of it.

Stupefied, she stared round.

'Where am I? What am I doing here?'

'Safe with me, little Katie.'

'With you? How can I be? — Mother! You don't — you can't . . . It was Margaret, I tell you, *Margaret*, not me! That bus never touched me, I swear it didn't! Do you think I wouldn't *know*?'

Again she was on her feet, went raging up and down, her bunched hands shaken convulsively, in defiance, in despair.

'I won't, I won't be dead, I tell you, I *won't*! — Besides, it's preposterous, it's insane. Never have I felt so alive! Oh, there's some awful mistake somewhere. Why, I've got years and years of life before me: I'm only thirty-six: I mean to live to be an old, old woman. Oh, do something, say something! Can't you see I'm going mad?' And flinging herself on her knees she hid her face in her mother's lap.

Now, her hat too was off; and she felt the touch of hands on her hair.

'Talk on, my child. You have many things to say to me.'

'You're wrong. I haven't, not one! Except that it's all a mistake. Or else I'm dreaming. Yes, that's what it is: just a hideous dream. The shock of seeing Margaret killed was too much for me. I shall wake up, I know I shall — I *will*! — and be able to laugh at myself.'

In her ears there was now a kind of singing, or humming, which added to her confusion. (But which was also a proof that she dreamed.)

'Oh, *why* couldn't the woman have stopped where she was? Why did she need to come to London? I never asked her to, I didn't want her. And this, this is all I get for being kind to her.'

'Was kindness your only motive, Katie?'

'What else?' And with a bitter laugh: 'Do you think I enjoyed dragging at her heels like a dog on a lead? Watching her fling about with pounds as if they were shillings — *I*, who am so poor, so poor? Don't you call that kind?'

To this there was no answer; except from the humming, which seemed to grow momentarily louder. She shook her head as if to chase off a winged pest, stopped her ears with her fingers; but neither helped. To drown it she was compelled to go on speaking.

'In every single shop we went to, her one thought was, to get the best of everything. More money than she knew what to do with, and no one but herself to spend it on. When she bought shoes, mother, I had to hide mine under the chair. And so . . . when the bus got her and I knew I'd never have to see that smug, self-satisfied face of hers again — oh, wasn't it only natural I couldn't feel sorry? You must understand that, you must, you must!'

Here, the humming rose to a wail, like the whine of a high, thin wind among the chimney-pots on an autumn night. (A sound that had always got her down.)

'And you, you're trying to make out it wasn't her but me — *me!* Oh, what shall I do?'

'Talk on, my child. Only your mother hears you.'

'Haven't I said enough? That I hated her — yes, *hated!* — and was glad she was run over?' But it seemed not, for once more she listened in vain for a response. Her face hardened. 'Very well, then, if it's not her, if it's me, and I'm dead, then I'll stop dead. And the dead don't talk.'

For these words she paid dear. The whining swelled to a screech, a chorus of screeches, like the fierce cawing and quacking of a swarm of rooks about to pounce. Bitterly she rued her bravado; tried to atone for it by carrying on, in a voice raised to all but a shout against the din.

'The one single thing I had better than her was my coat. She couldn't touch *that*. Oh, how thankful I was I'd worn it! Though it nearly did for me. You were right, every one of you, when you told me to take it off. This is the first time to-day I'm able to breathe.'

'Good, child, good. But go on, make haste.'

'Why? What's the hurry?'

But even as she put the question, she too began to feel that time was flying. To let it escape unused was somehow to court disaster.

Yet still she fenced and hedged.

'Yes, there — the coat, I mean — I had her. And — and Harry. For she'd never managed to get a husband; nobody ever asked *her* to marry them. She's one of your born old maids. *And* envious! When I told her about Harry, how fond he is of me and the fuss he makes over me, she went green with envy. But — Oh, mother, mother, what *is* the awful noise inside my head? Is this what it means to die? I'm frightened, I'm frightened. Oh, help me, for you can, you know how, if only you will!'

'No one can help you but yourself, child. But be quick, your chance is passing.'

In the knees she leant on she thought she felt a movement as if to rise, and panic seized her.

'For God's *sake*, don't go, don't leave me! . . . alone in this fog.'

For the mist was gathering again; had come as low as the face above her, blurring its outlines. More: even as she looked these seemed to change their shape, to be growing fluid. Terror at the sight broke down her last defences. Taking the other's dress in both hands, bringing it up round her face for a screen, she began to speak, so fast, in so little above a whisper that, to any mortal ear, what now came would have been inaudible.

'Stay with me, only stay, and I'll tell you everything. Oh, I've been a wicked woman, mother. I'm a liar and — and a thief, yes, rotten through and through. Nothing I told Margaret was true. Harry never gave me this coat. He never gives me anything. He doesn't care a hang for me. Nor I for him. I hate him and despise him. I only took him because there was no one else. And ever since I married him I've tricked him and done him. The money I got for the house, I've always kept back part of it. It didn't hurt him, for he didn't know. He's the sort of man who never knows anything; what he eats or what things cost. Or sees how shabby I go. And anyhow he wouldn't care, he's got no pride *in* him. For months and months I've been saving up to buy a coat. But it was never enough. And when I heard Margaret was coming — *she* to see what I had sunk to! — I couldn't bear it, mother, I simply couldn't.'

The tears were streaming now, splashing hot on cheeks, hands, dress.

'And so . . . I got a bunch of keys at the ironmonger's, and found one that fitted the drawer where he keeps his money, for rates and things, and took it and went out and bought this coat. But surely as much for *his* sake as mine? That Margaret shouldn't know how mean, how despicably mean he is? No, wait, stop, that's not true. But at least I meant to sell it again after she went, and put the money back. Or didn't I? Oh, God, I don't know, don't know any more what's true and what isn't. Perhaps I meant to keep it — he's never at home by day to see what I wear. And it was going to be quite easy to invent a burglary, turn the rooms upside down, say the house had been broken into while I was out. But *now* he'll open the drawer and find the money gone and see the coat and know me for what I am — a common thief. Oh, just one day more, *only* one, to put things right! You can do it, you can save me . . . *Mother!*'

Humming, wailing, cawing alike had ceased. In her and about her lay a stillness that was as precious as balm to a wound, or the sudden lull in a griping, gutting pain. But her joy in it was short-lived, for now, past question, her mother was making ready to go. She widened her hold, clung for dear life: but to what? To a form which, from flesh and blood, was growing intangible as air. And which, in thinning, was receding, fading back into the mists from which it had sprung. She staggered up to follow, and, as she did, caught her foot in the coat, lying on the ground. And some impulse made her stoop to this, pick it up and drag it after her, by one sleeve.

Too late. Now, all that remained to her was a voice: so faint, so far, that it had no more body to it than the echo of an echo, heard from the high hills.

'I shall be waiting for you . . . be waiting.'

'Tch! I do believe she's coming to,' said the nurse in the Casualty Ward, and threw a troubled glance at the house-surgeon, who, his job done, had turned aside. 'Look! . . . actually trying to speak.'

With a swab of cotton-wool she wiped the blood and foam from monstrously distorted lips, all that was now to be seen for bandages of the dying face, and, stooping, put her ear to them.

'I'm afraid she's gone, your friend,' she said a few minutes later to the shocked, benumbed woman who kept vigil in the corridor. 'But believe me, it's better so. Though we haven't managed to get hold of her husband yet.'

Here she hesitated. And, with an eye to stuff, cut and cost of the other's clothing, asked a little diffidently: 'Is your . . . are you by any chance "Margaret?" Oh, yes? So it *was* you she was thinking of. She seemed to be trying to tell you something. It was all very jumbled and confused; I only got a word here and there. Something about a coat—the one she had on when she was brought in, I suppose — and a thief. Perhaps she was afraid it had been stolen. Though,' very apologetically, 'it did seem once as if she was calling herself a thief. Still, they often talk nonsense at the end. Well, sorry I couldn't make much of it. I'm afraid you won't, either.'

But, on coming face to face with the shabby, careworn little man, of the sloping shoulders and limp, uncertain movements, that was Harry, Margaret, deeply pitying, believed she understood.

Blind Man's Buff

BY ROBERT WESTERBY

(From *John o' London's Weekly*)

MR. NASH ran up the first flight of stairs on his tiptoes as lightly as he could, and paused on the landing, listening. He puffed a little, and his rather red face was shiny with the sudden effort. But the usual rather fatuous grin was still on his lips.

He put his hand on the banister, and began the next flight slowly, and with elaborate care. This seemed rather silly, because the children were making a great deal of noise up in the nursery.

Outside the nursery door, Mr. Nash paused and snapped his fingers as an idea came to him. Grinning even more widely, he went over to a chair on which were two or three hats the children had thrown there. He picked up the smallest—it would be Jimmy's, by the look of it—and perched it on the top of his shining bald head. He threw open the nursery door with a bang.

'Tarr-rarrh!' he roared, striking a Napoleonic attitude and laughing down at the four children. They stared back at him in astonishment, and Jimmy, who was farthest away, laughed slightly and whispered something to Paul, who was next to him. Paul laughed and nodded.

'Well, well, well, kiddie-widdies!' Mr. Nash boomed joyously. 'Here's that old Uncle Nash again! Well, hello, Paul . . . hello, Mary . . . hello, Jimmy, and —' He paused, smiling down at the fourth child. 'Hello — and who's this?' he said.

She was a small-built little girl with short brown hair and a very freckled face. Her brown eyes had a strangely direct look as she stared back at him, but she didn't say anything.

'It's Anne Kerrish,' Paul said politely. 'You've seen her before, Uncle Nash. You remember, at —'

'Anne?' Mr. Nash shouted. 'I know: Anne-panne Kerrish? You bet! Wheeee!' He reached forward and swung the startled little girl high into the air. She turned pale, and her big eyes seemed almost to start from her head as he caught her and put her down again.

'Yes, at the sea — last July, wasn't it?' Mr. Nash boomed. 'I knew I'd seen you before, you little rascal! Ho-ho-ho! I never forget any kiddie I see! You bet!' He beamed round at them. 'Well, how about some sweets?' he said, producing two small packages. 'Aha! How would that go, eh?'

As he handed the sweets to the two little girls he could feel the solemn eyes of Paul on him. He glanced round uncomfortably. Paul was staring at the small hat which was still perched on the round, bald head. Mr. Nash flushed and took off the hat without really knowing why. The four children watched him silently and cautiously.

'Well, and what were you fellers up to?' Mr. Nash said. 'A fine old racket you were kicking up! Heard you down at the corner of the street. I'll bet it was all that young Jimmy there! Aha, you rascal!' he roared, laughing excitedly, and charged at the little boy, who fled, squealing. Mr. Nash laughed the louder, and began tearing round the room after him, whooping like an Indian. The other children looked at one another, undecided and a trifle nervous. Jimmy seemed to be terrified.

'No!' he squeaked, when finally cornered, and there was a genuine panic in his voice as Mr. Nash, grinning with pleasure and triumph, hovered over him.

'Aha! Got you!' Mr. Nash boomed, and rolled the boy over, tickling him and rumpling his hair. Jimmy kicked out, wriggling frantically to get away, and Mr. Nash laughed the louder. Boy, was he having fun! Lovely kids, sweet kids, nothing in the world like them! He stood upright, flushed and beaming. He was feeling rather hot now with all that exercise; it was extraordinary how much it took out of you. Kiddies were very tiring work.

'Oooh — poof! I'll show you,' he said amiably. 'Just wait a

moment while I get my old wind back . . . Arrr! and who's next for the ogrè's clutches?' Paul? Mary? Mary wriggled and made faint sounds of protest and distress, and Paul, with a cold look on his small face, moved towards her. Mr. Nash looked away. Paul was making him feel a little uncomfortable. He was a strange kiddie — not playful and jolly like the others at all.

'Ho-ho! Then it's Anne-pannel!' Mr. Nash boomed suddenly. Anne stood her ground, but she looked frightened. Mr. Nash seemed enormous to her; gigantic, terrifying. She remembered the time during that vacation when he had taken her out to sea on his back, and ducked her, roaring with just this same laughter. She had been so scared that she thought she would die. She could remember the way Mr. Nash had laughed and joked so happily about her screaming to be put down . . . He was laughing that way now, as though he didn't hear anything else. Desperately she pushed the sweet she was sucking into the corner of her cheek with her tongue. 'Lesh — lesh play at shumshing,' she gasped thickly. 'Pleash, Mr. Nash — *pleash!*'

Mr. Nash paused, delighted. Great kiddies! 'Let's play something!' Have some fun, eh? They knew he was one of them, all right; they always knew it. Kids couldn't be fooled at all. They always knew when a grown-up was on their side. 'All right — fine!' he said, rubbing his hands together. 'What'll it be — Blind Man's Buff?'

Paul smiled strangely. His usually solemn eyes were very bright with some kind of excitement. 'All right,' he said. 'Let's play that, then.'

Mr. Nash beamed wider. Good old Paul! That was better. He had probably felt rather put out at first, having an old uncle butting in — probably he had been organizing some game or other. He liked to boss the other children a little too much, sometimes. But he seemed to have thawed out all right now. Patience! That was all that was needed. The kiddie-widdies always came round in the end.

'Fine! I'll be Blind Man — eh? Come on, then, Mary. Get me

a scarf or something. Come on, buck up, Anne! Hurry . . . hurry, hurry!' He laughed happily, and began a little jig-step to make them laugh too. This was wonderful! Alice could stay downstairs with John and Martha and talk about the Servant Problem, or about Politics, if she liked — but not he! No, sir! The kiddies for him every time!

Mary found a black silk scarf, and Paul came across and told Mr. Nash to bend down so that he could tie it on. Mr. Nash bent down and submitted eagerly. Paul's face was very flushed.

When the scarf was tied, and Mr. Nash had sworn he really could not see a thing, they spun him round and gave him a little push. 'Boo-hoo!' he roared in mock distress. 'I'm lost! I'm lost! I can't find the wa-ay!' He staggered about the room, banging into the table and the chairs. The children seemed to be very quiet all at once. He could hear the little girls giggling, and Paul's voice whispering to them; but that was all.

The young rascals! They were up to something — you could bet on that — bless them!

'Arrrr!' he rumbled in a deep voice. 'Look out for yourselves, kiddie-widdies! Here comes the mountain-lion! Arrrr!'

He spread wide his arms, holding his head low, and charged towards the whispering voices. His uncertain steps hesitated, and a chair fell against the side of his knee. He turned, laughing excitedly, and suddenly was pushed violently in the chest. 'Whoa!' he roared, tottering, his arms waving, clutching for support, and crashed to the floor.

He rolled over, half hurt, half amused, laughing still, and then they were on him. He could feel all four of them; at his head; at his body; and at his arms; punching, pinching, and banging away at his face with their small fists. He tried to roll away from them, cursing the scarf tied across his face. In his ears the children's yells of excitement sounded strange and shrill, almost hysterical.

'Don't . . . don't . . . kiddies!' he spluttered frantically, and heaved himself to his feet, shaking them from his arms, scared of hurting them. They backed away, suddenly quiet.

He pulled the scarf from his eyes, and walked uncertainly towards the door. His face was smarting where he had been hit, and his body ached.

'Hey, now, children, that's not fair,' he said jerkily. 'That's not fair, you know.' He looked down at them. They were all pale, and bright-eyed with excitement. They looked at him as he stood facing them, saying nothing. Something had happened; something was wrong all of a sudden.

He turned away, rubbing his fat hand across his forehead, as he understood. 'Sorry, kiddies,' he said slowly, and smiled awkwardly at them. 'I guess I made a mistake. You'd better go on with your game while I talk to your — to your mother and father. I'll see you later on . . . I expect.'

They watched him as he turned and left the room, and as he walked to the stairs he could still feel their tension. But as he reached the hall they began to shout. They yelled and thumped as they danced round the nursery. They were laughing, and once Paul's voice rang out above the others, very clearly. 'Tarr-rarrh! Hello, kiddie-widdies! . . . Ho-ho-ho, the mountain-lion!'

Mr. Nash went red, and wiped his face with his hand again.

He crossed the hall to the living-room. Inside the room he could hear his wife talking.

'Just listen to the noise those children are making up there, for heaven's sake,' she said. 'That'll be that great baby Harry! I'll bet that's him making that noise just now!' She laughed slightly. 'If I'd had children I'd have been driven crazy years ago, I always say.'

Mr. Nash pushed open the door and went in. He smiled round the room, and sat down uneasily.

'Harry! What have you been doing?' his wife said, looking at him.

The children's mother looked at him as well, and frowned. 'Why, Harry, your cheek! What have those little demons been playing now?' she said. 'They've scratched your face, Harry. They've hurt you.'

Mr. Nash looked at her and smiled foolishly. 'Oh, no, they didn't hurt my face,' he said, and looked down at his fat, clumsy hands. 'No, that was nothing,' he said again. 'That was nothing at all.'

'How did it happen?' his wife said in an irritated voice.

Mr. Nash glanced across at her, flushing darkly. 'They were showing me something,' he said awkwardly. 'They were showing me something I'd never seen before. We played Blind Man's Buff.'

'Blind Man's Buff? That's not a new game. You've played it before, Harry.'

Mr. Nash looked down at his hands again. 'Yes, I've played it for years,' he said. 'I've played it longer than I know.'

The Nawpin' Stick

BY MALACHI WHITAKER

(From *John o' London's Weekly*)

SOME time last century Marthann must have been young, but as soon as this one crept over the edge of the world with the January sun she seemed to put on the mask with the under-shot jaw, the short, wiry grey hair, the wrinkle-lidded brown eyes, even the oval pink chin-mole pierced by a tuft of stiff whiskers.

Marthann had six children of her own, and the one which she called without false shame a by-blow, left behind by her dead, unmarried sister, and named Randall Halliday. She also had a tall, ginger-headed Scandinavian husband, who got his life's consolation not through wife or children or even his compulsorily adopted nephew, but through beer. He would work steadily all week at his job — he was described simply as a labourer, but Marthann called him, sarcastically, a navvy's clerk, when anybody asked her what he did. He hardly spoke to his wife, and was known to knock her around the house in a shameful way most Sundays, but she adored him with a fierce devotion, and would not hear a word against him.

Each Friday — he always called Friday the Lord's Day because he drew his wages then — he would work his way steadily up the village from the White Bear to the Sailor. On Saturday and Sunday he would repeat the performance, but less steadily; and late Sunday night, whatever money was left Marthann would wrench from him, sometimes crying out of blackened eyes, but only with sorrow and not with anger.

There was never enough left to clothe and feed the nine of them, so, of course, she had to work herself. With the years, her skin was worn and shaped in changing grooves by the action of soda and water, her knuckles swelled with rheumatism, her legs ached unceasingly, and her occasional smile was only a grimace, which showed the wrong row of teeth.

In spite of the nine people who lived in it, the cottage was shamelessly bare. The walls were whitewashed instead of having a coloured and patterned wallpaper on them. The well-fingered doors were scrubbed weekly to a uniform greyness, for if Marthann worked most of the time in other people's houses she would not in any particular neglect her own. There was no fireside so black and shiny as hers, though it was by now falling to pieces under her energetic hands.

Every so often a district visitor would call. One of the children would run secretly to fetch the mother from her job and she would come hurrying down the road, wiping her soapy arms on her sacking apron, scuffing up her stiff hair, as if preparing for a battle. It was always her dread that, owing either to her husband's well-known week-end habits or her own necessity to find work outside the house, one or all of the children would be taken from her.

'Good morning,' she would say, half-angrily, half propitiatingly. 'I were just up t' yard.'

The district visitor would point out that children should not be left alone in the house without a fireguard, and Marthann would counter by saying, 'There's nowt to set afire.' For there was very little on the scrubbed stone floor beyond the necessary table and chairs and a leviathan of a couch, used as a bed by night and a hospital by day as it was needed. And that would set the visitor to talking about the bareness of the house, and how Marthann might at least embellish it with a few cheap ornaments in red and blue, or some coloured knick-knacks on the shelf. Before she left, she would fumble with a parcel and then with her own hands tack up a representation of some lady in a yellow Empire dress holding out a packet of tea ingratiatingly, or even a hunting scene complete with pink coats and pack of near-pink hounds, scrolled over and over with the name of a brand of tobacco or a local grocer.

'There!' she would cry, puffing triumphantly after her labours. 'Doesn't that make a difference to the room?'

'It does, indeed,' Marthann would agree grimly. 'It looks like a pub, now,' she would add after the visitor was gone. And down

would come the yellow lady or the bright huntsmen (much to the distress of Randall, the by-blow, who was hungry for colour), to be used as a kind of copybook for the aspiring children. When it was filled with letters — 'i' throws a ball up, 'a' like a swan, 'g' with a tail on, tossed briskly to one or other of the children from a Marthann who knew little more than letters and figures herself — it would be used as kindling for the fire.

Marthann was a whirling mass of ambition, not for herself, but for the little ones. In the eyes of other people, though never in her own, she might have made a mistake with her loutish husband, but her children were going to be different. Of course, they would have to work half-time when they were twelve — it wouldn't do to go against human nature, and the whole village would be up in arms if she tried any tricks — but there was always the night school 'at town,' and that they should attend, whether they wanted to or not, even the unwanted Randall.

No wonder Marthann was full of ambition. Wasn't she a daughter of Old Jack, the Baildon poet, whose photograph had been taken as he came home from the mill in his white brat and peaked cap by some legendary Photographic Society, and even shown in London? Because of the proud-flying grey curls, and the forehead packed with poetry, Marthann thought that the photograph might well be shown anywhere in the world, with profit to the onlooker. Alas, that all the poetry had died with her father! He couldn't write, so he had only declaimed his poems. And now all were buried with him in the churchyard, and Baildon was the poorer for it. But Marthann had her houseful of children, and from them one day a new Baildon poet might arise.

Meantime, the family needed discipline, and that was why she was so glad when one Christmas her husband presented her with a carved nawpin' stick, so that she might correct the children at her leisure, without loss of dignity. He had spent weeks on perfecting his gift, and the long years of sacrifice on her part seemed a small thing beside the fact that he should think of her at all.

The stick was a long one, and had a tapering top with a knob on

the end of it, which was able to bob about almost like a live thing, and tap the hand or head of any youthful offender at table. It was slipped into the arm of the mother's chair, and at the first sign of insubordination on the part of a child, the stick was pulled out and the delinquent was 'nawped.' At least, that was the idea. Marthann had been brought up that way, with many a rap from the Baildon poet. But she got into the habit of passing over her own children's quarrels, and in the end, the stick was used only on the nephew, Randall, who was a sullen rebel. Marthann told herself that she had done her level best to like him, and she could not. She knew herself for a bad woman, as she dabbed at the boy with the nawpin' stick, hitting him harder and harder, as though the stick were a form of magic, and one day, with its aid, she could banish Randall from her life.

Randall the by-blow sat on a low wooden bridge, swinging his feet — freed for once from the confinement of his older cousin's ill-fitting boots — over the swift-running beck. A dirty glass jar, holding mud and water and a few lively tadpoles snatched from Calvert's weedy pond a field's length away, stood at his side. Lacking a net, he had caught the tiny things with his fingers, and now he was sitting, savouring for a moment the joys of possession, and thinking.

He thought first of his Uncle Swen, who had died in disgrace, drunk, on Saturday night, in a quarrel. The name of his Uncle Swen was really Sven, Sven Endersen; but people had always called him Swen, and that was how he would be remembered — not on his tombstone; there would be no tombstone for him — but as the local newspaper *In Memoriam* notices said (though not about Uncle Swen), in the hearts of those who loved him.

From the thought of Uncle Swen, Randall went very naturally to his Aunt Marthann. It was dreadful just now to see her with red, wrinkled eyelids; with even the whiskers on her mole not aggressive any longer, but drooping down her pale, sagging chin; dreadful to think that silly, drunken Uncle Swen could upset her so much, even by death. For Marthann had always derided her

husband, and nagged him the week long, saying that if she had to suffer, he should suffer too. And now she was prostrated by his death. He was her reason for living, and he had been taken away from her. By her grief, anyone could see that she had loved him from the very minute she saw his gleaming Scandinavian head.

Randall swung his feet restlessly, and wished that Aunt Marthann had liked him. All he had ever done was get on her nerves. 'Aht o' t' road, thee,' she would cry to him threateningly, as she flew around, working. 'Get thysen from under me feet — thee and thy etarnal libr'y books. What good dosta think readin'll ivver do thee? Tha wants to get some wark done.'

'And what good's wark ivver done thee?' he wanted to shout in reply, dreading day by day the fact that he was nearer twelve, nearer than ever to being a half-timer. Joe, and Edgar, and Jim had passed through the same period, spending half a day at the mill, half a day at school, and bringing home their three-and-sixpence or four shillings each Friday, according to whether they had worked the longer or the shorter part of the day. Now they worked full time, and were quite happy and used to the mill, passively resisting any idea of night school. Or at least, they didn't complain, and they behaved like men already, pulling whips of cigarettes from behind wool-greasy ears, lighting the ends, and having a couple of puffs at them, sometimes just behind their mother's back. And the girls, his cousins Bessie and Annie and Joanna, were looking forward with all their hearts to being weavers some day.

Randall knew what he wanted. And it was not work in a mill. In his mind was something rather like the side-show of a fair, because that — seen once in his life — was the nearest to what he really wanted; a different life, a different world, a garish round of colour and smoke and movement and glitter, of changed and changing faces and voices. Already he knew that he was not his Aunt Marthann's child, and that he was not even a good or desirable sort of child, but one of the unwanted kind. He was most unruly, the one least amenable to discipline, among the children.

And sometimes he would think rebelliously, 'Perhaps my father was a prince, and he will come some day and take me away, and dress me in fine clothes, and we will ride all round the world in a pony trap.' One day he said that aloud, and his Aunt Marthann glared at him, and brought the nawpin' stick down on his head with a resounding thwack.

'Thi father'll noan come for thee wi' a pony trap,' she said. 'He'll come wi' horns and hoofs and a tail, and thi mother'll be wi' 'm.'

'Hod thi din, woman,' Uncle Swen had cried, looking at her angrily. 'His mother were a better wench nor thee, ony day,' and he had snatched the stick from her hand. It was from this scene that the big man had gone out to meet his death, and Randall knew that his aunt would never forgive him as long as he lived.

But there was always the memory of his grandfather to fall back on. He collected with zealous love every anecdote about the old man. 'Why did they call him Poet Jack, Aunt Marthann?' he had asked. And in one of her rare, unhurried moments his aunt had told him stories of her father. It seemed that long ago, when he was a boy, and already making his poems, he refused to go to church, and sat outside, under the trees, whittling sticks and saying his poetry. The parson had come to round up the black sheep, but the black sheep refused to return to that fold.

'Why sud Ah come into thy church?' he asked, 'when God's i' heaven ahtside, and t' birds is singin' in t' trees, and t' becks is runnin' ower t' stones? What's tha gotten to say better na that?'

And for punishment, the parson had had him put in the stocks, where he sat the whole day long, reciting his poetry until he was released, not a whit disturbed by the disgrace. He was one of the last men to be put in the Baildon stocks. 'And if that's summat to be proud of, then tha can be proud of thy grandfather,' finished Aunt Marthann.

Randall thought it something more to be proud of than bringing up a family like his cousins, the three boys at the mill, and likely to stay there for the rest of their lives, the three girls still at school.

There was some talking of stopping the half-timers, now, but there was not much to choose between mill and school, except that money was to be earned at the mill.

Randall looked down at the beck, and for the first time he got the idea of running away. It was the only way to leave the hated nawpin' stick behind. Everything in his life that was unfair seemed to centre in the nawpin' stick — the old clothes he had to wear, the pleasures he never received, the punishments that were his for nothing. Life had been bad enough with Uncle Swen alive, but now he was dead, it would become worse than ever.

The boy knew he must leave the only home he had ever known. The blue spring sky with its few delicate clouds seemed to freeze above him. The trees stopped moving in the wind and even the murmur of the water was hushed and stilled at the instant the thought thundered. Mechanically, he lifted the jam jar and took it back to the pond to empty it of its contents, knowing the tadpoles would die if he put them in the running stream. Vaguely he realized that he was about to plunge into a running stream himself, but that something would bear him up. That something was the knowledge that, deep down, he was a poet, too, and that he would rather find the wide ocean, whatever sorrows it brought him, than stay in the village pond. So thinking, the boy walked slowly homeward, his long dark hair falling over his dreaming eyes.

Randall Halliday walked up Baildon Hill realizing that forty years had passed very quickly indeed, that he had never revisited the home of his childhood, that his Aunt Marthann could not possibly be alive still, and yet, here he was, wrapped in a cloud of memories, still with his long dark hair falling over his dreaming eyes.

But now he cut a much better and a much bigger figure. No longer was he wearing a cousin's cast-off clothes and boots, though he had much of the same resentment against life, for different reasons.

The running away had been a successful idea, but that was only the beginning. There had been many bad years to go through

before the little dark-haired boy had found what he was really seeking — a stage and players — and many happier years behind the dirt and darkness of the stage doors, beyond the frowsty shared bedrooms of provincial lodgings, and amid the unforgettable atmosphere of grease-paint and hope and tears and joy. Years of war, and years of time when war ceased temporarily, and a man might have good ideas and sell them with increasing success; might write plays, new ones, good ones, which refused to come off, that were meant from the beginning to set the runaway boy on the pinnacle of fame.

An impulse had sent him back to the scenes of his childhood, and an impulse had stopped him from using a car to aid his return. He would walk up the hill as he used to do. It was all vastly different to his eyes, and yet the heart of the hill was still there. Buses roared past him, going to the colonies of new houses that crept to the very moor-edge. So many buildings had spread across the valleys that it was difficult to tell where Leeds ended and Bradford began. Smoke hung over everything. Yet it was spring again, and because of that, earth had the beauty of eternal youth. Here and there, an old house kept its old grace, and a new garden thrust itself arrogantly forward to be lovely in its own place and time. Lilac, purple and white, bloomed above the grime, and nothing could dim the feathery yellow-green of young leaves on hardy trees, or kill the radiance of aubretia among the stones of rock gardens.

The cottage door stood wide open to the spring sunshine when eventually the man reached his old home. In a minute, he saw that everything was the same, the whitewashed walls, the bare, scrubbed floor, even the wooden chairs, and the firelight that winked back from the polished range. It could only mean one thing. His Aunt Marthann must be still alive.

He became a boy again. Sweat burst suddenly on his palm, and spread, and his knees trembled as he entered the living-room. His aunt, her hair standing wild and stiff and white above her still-bright eyes, was sitting on the leviathan couch knitting a grey woollen sock. She looked up, and her eyes knew him.

'So th'art back agen, lad,' she said in a matter-of-fact voice. She took in his appearance with sharp curiosity, her needles clicking an uninterrupted tune.

'I'm sorry, Aunt Marthann,' said the man, clearing his voice. 'I ought to have come before this, I know.'

'Appen it's as well tha didn't,' she said composedly, 'and 'appen I know what tha's come for now.'

She rose from her seat and pressed the singing kettle into the red of the fire.

'We'll have a cup o' tea.'

After a while, Randall asked how his cousins were faring. 'All alive and blawin', and all buyin' their own houses, which I bet is 'more than you are, in spite o' t' fine cloas. Have ye gotten a wife, even?'

'No, I'm not married.'

'Termorrer, it'll do termorrer. Same shiftless soart as ivver. 'Th'aht thi mother ower ageean, leavin' it till it's too late to wed. Not that shoo ivver 'ad a chance —'

It was only the second time he had ever heard Aunt Marthann mention his mother, her dead sister. Over the cup of tea was the time to ask what he had come to find out from somebody. Since he had reluctantly abandoned the idea of a prince who would come for him in a pony trap, he had imagined himself to be the son of some strolling player, a handsome vagabond who had come to the village, captured his mother's loving young heart, and vanished like a bright star down the horizon. He could have been a gipsy, even — anyhow, something different from this cold northern stock. Someone who had planted in his son a seed that had striven on and up towards the light, away from a poor beginning, away from the besotted lout he still remembered, his harsh wife, and their insipid children.

'Perhaps you'll tell me who my father was, aunt,' he said, 'for you'll be the only one left who knows.'

'Appen I will,' said his aunt, 'for I'm the only one 'at knaws. There were two on us once, but now there's only me. Thi Uncle Swen were thi father. What else didta expect?'

There was a moment's heavy silence in the whitewashed cottage kitchen. The man's face crumpled. 'Oh, my God!' he said. 'That drunken swine — '

'Don't thee say one word against thi father,' cried the old woman fiercely, her angry hand beating the troubled air as if she were once more reaching for the nawpin' stick.

Iron on Iron

BY WOODROW WYATT

(From *Kingdom Come*)

JOHN and Miss Fitch watched each other hostilely over the tea-table in the nursery. They had both felt a prick of instant dislike when Miss Fitch arrived that afternoon. John drew back instinctively at the sight of her neatly labelled baggage in the hall, with Miss Fitch standing prim and menacing in front of it. He lurked in the shadow by the stairs, and his mother had to push him forward to meet his first governess.

'He's very shy,' she explained.

John scowled and looked at his feet. He hated to have explanations made for him, to hear what his mother fancied to be his weaknesses paraded before strangers. Miss Fitch saw the resentment in his face.

Difficult child, she thought. Will need careful handling. 'Oh, he mustn't be shy of me,' she said over-enthusiastically, and gathered him up in her arms. John bore the indignity passively, but with evident distaste. 'Perhaps he's too big to be picked up now,' she said a little nervously, and put him down. It was not a good beginning.

And now there was no mistaking their enmity. John had refused to start his tea with a plain piece of bread and butter. When he had reached for the jam Miss Fitch had said, 'No, John. Have one piece without jam first.'

'Why?' he asked sullenly.

This sudden questioning of one of the cardinal principles of her faith had been too much for Miss Fitch. She was uneasily aware that her usual reply, 'Because it's polite', wouldn't satisfy this determined child. It didn't, and she was forced to the device of making him the concession, 'as it was the first day.' It was a defeat, and they both knew it.

Miss Fitch thought angrily to herself that she mustn't give another inch. If John felt any triumph he didn't show it. His dark eyes stared steadily at her and his expression remained set and determined.

Miss Fitch tried conversation. Did he like playing in the garden? Yes. Should they go into the garden after tea? If she wanted to. What were his favourite games? He didn't know.

Just then his mother came in. 'Making friends?' she asked brightly. 'We're getting on very well, thank you. Aren't we, John?' John was indignant at this attempt to force his hand. He turned his head to the window. 'Yes,' he said coldly.

His mother seemed not to notice his indifference. 'Well, that's splendid. He goes to bed at half-past six, you know, Miss Fitch.'

'Half-past six, Mrs. Armitage? Isn't that a little late for a child of seven? I think six would be better.'

'Oh, do you think so? Well, do as you think best.'

'But, mummy —' John began, but Mrs. Armitage was already on her way out of the room.

Miss Fitch smiled. She was feeling easier now. This sign of Mrs. Armitage's support was a victory, and she was confident that she could subdue this strange child. But the sight of John's face made her uncomfortable again—it was black and uncompromising.

The next few days were painful for Miss Fitch. John's original dislike hardened to hatred. Always he was scrupulously polite to her. He never gave her a legitimate opportunity to punish him, or even rebuke him. He did as he was told, but he did it with a cold defiance. Her attempts at cheerfulness only made him stubbornly sulky. He never smiled at her or laughed with her. Miss Fitch felt she was making no headway. And all the time it seemed as though he were waiting, watching for some chance to defeat her.

Although she had obedience from him, she knew she hadn't established her superiority over him. She was never certain that open rebellion might not break out and she would be unable to deal with it. Her attitude to her charges was that she would be friends with them or triumph over them. She knew she could never be the first with John, and she had lost all wish for it. His hate for her was almost fully returned. She resolved that it should be the second.

Somehow she would show him that she was in complete control; drive a willingness into his actions. If he could not love her, he

could fear her. If only he would commit some flagrant indiscretion; that would give her the excuse for punishing him severely. His punctilious behaviour was a barrier between them. It protected him from her domination. As long as he kept to it this unsatisfactory position would remain unchanged. He could keep her impotent, at arm's length.

Mrs. Armitage had seen the strife between them. When they were alone she asked John if he liked her.

'No,' he said resignedly.

'But you must learn to, John. She's very nice and she wants to be friends with you.'

'But I don't like her, mummy. Can't she go away?'

'No, John. You'll get to like her soon.'

Mrs. Armitage was impressed by her neat, methodical ways, by her insistence on discipline. That was what John needed. He had been left to have his own way too much. Leading an ordered, regulated life would do him good, and once the novelty of it had worn off he could be as fond of Miss Fitch as he had ever been of the nurses who indulged him too much.

But Mrs. Armitage was mistaken in the reason for his hatred of Miss Fitch. He was as willing to be disciplined as any other child of seven, but he hated her petty, domineering ways. He hated her sharpness and he knew there was no warmth in her. She enforced her conventions of leaving a little on the plate, the first piece of bread and butter without jam (a subject which he had never disputed with her since the first day) for their own sake and for no reason that he could understand. He felt that she was continually driving him into a corner, looking out for a chance to humiliate and triumph over him. But he was not prepared to capitulate and he was determined to be rid of her.

It was on a wet, blowing afternoon that Miss Fitch's opportunity came. She had left John alone in the nursery for a few minutes. When she came back he was kneeling on the floor by the open window. Around him were strewn the remains of the blue jug that stood on the little table by the window, and the flowers it once held.

John was dismally trying to clear up the mess.

Miss Fitch's eyes gleamed, and her voice came shrill across the room. 'Good gracious, John, whatever have you done? You can't be trusted by yourself for a minute. The moment I go out of the room you get into mischief.'

'I didn't do it, Miss Fitch,' said John quietly.

'Don't make it worse by lying, child.' A fury seized her and she rushed at him, grabbing him by the shoulders.

'I didn't do it, Miss Fitch,' he repeated.

'How can you lie so? No one else has been in here. It must have been you.' And she pulled him across her knee and smacked him, hard.

When she had finished, John stood up and looked at her. 'Miss Fitch, I didn't do it,' he said steadily through his tears. 'The wind blew the curtain out and it got caught round it and pulled it off.'

A misgiving came on Miss Fitch. Suppose he were telling the truth. It *might* have happened. But she had gone too far now. She put the thought resolutely from her.

'Nonsense, child,' and there was no weakening in her voice. 'I don't know what will become of you, inventing stories like this. You'd better go straight to bed for the rest of the day.'

But her victory had turned to nothing. His contempt for her was greater, and his hatred was ready to turn vindictive. She had failed to touch the hard inner core of him. She knew now that he had been telling the truth and she saw from those dark eyes, that she loathed, that he realized she knew.

It was a few days after this that Miss Fitch's things began to disappear. First it was her scissors that went, then her thimble. Soon after, a brooch and her nail file followed. She made no bones about accusing John. Who else would take them? It must have been he.

'I don't think my son is a thief,' Mrs. Armitage said haughtily.

Miss Fitch was abashed, but her private opinion was unchanged.

A period of suspicion began for the whole household. The servants were questioned, denied any knowledge of the thefts, and began to watch each other's movements. Mr. and Mrs. Armitage were disquieted. Meanwhile the predatory raids on Miss Fitch's property

continued, and she remained convinced that John was the culprit.

Alone with his mother, John said he thought Miss Fitch said it was he because she didn't like him. 'She doesn't like me, mummy. I know she doesn't. She just says it's me.' His mother said nothing, but she was worried.

Soon after the thefts began Miss Fitch was out shopping, and John and his mother were together downstairs. Mrs. Armitage was sewing when she stopped and looked up. 'John, I've broken my needle. Will you run upstairs and get Miss Fitch's work bag? I expect there's another one there. It's on the nursery table — I saw it before I came down.'

When John brought it he sat down facing her, and watched her intently.

'What a lot of things she keeps in her bag. I'll never find a needle among all this.' And she turned the bag over on the floor.

In a rush all Miss Fitch's vanished articles tumbled out. Her scissors, her nail file — everything that she had said had been stolen. Mrs. Armitage swept them all back and with a composed face put down her sewing and picked up a book.

John sat on the edge of his chair and his eyes never left her face. He was trembling with anxiety, wondering what his mother would do when Miss Fitch came back. There was not long to wait. The moment her step was heard outside the door Mrs. Armitage got up and went towards her as she came in, the bag outstretched in her hand.

'Miss Fitch, I borrowed your bag to borrow a needle. I found all the things you suggested my son had stolen inside. Under the circumstances I think you had better leave at once.'

Miss Fitch flushed. She was confused and bewildered. Then she saw John's face. The smile of triumph was unmistakable.

'Mrs. Armitage, I didn't do it. Your son —'

'I don't want to hear any more about my son, thank you, Miss Fitch. You've said quite enough as it is. Will you go now, please?'

In an hour the neatly labelled baggage was once more in the hall. A taxi was standing in the drive and John, his nose pressed joyously against the drawing-room window, was gazing out at it.

THE BEST SHORT STORIES: 1940

American and Canadian

The People vs. Abe Lathan, Colored

BY ERSKINE CALDWELL

(From *Esquire*)

UNCLE ABE was shucking corn in the crib when Luther Bolick came down from the big white house on the hill and told him to pack up his household goods and move off the farm. Uncle Abe had grown a little deaf and he did not hear what Luther said the first time.

'These old ears of mine are bothering me again, Mr. Luther!' Uncle Abe said. 'I just can't seem to hear as good as I used to.'

Luther looked at the Negro and scowled. Uncle Abe had got up and was standing in the crib door where he could hear better.

'I said, I want you and your family to pack up your furniture and anything else that really belongs to you, and move off.'

Uncle Abe reached out and clutched at the crib door for support.

'Move off?' Uncle Abe said.

He looked into his landlord's face unbelievably.

'Mr. Luther, you don't mean that, do you?' Uncle Abe asked, his voice shaking. 'You must be joking, ain't you, Mr. Luther?'

'You heard me right, even if you do pretend to be half deaf,' Luther said angrily, turning around and walking several steps. 'I want you off the place by the end of the week. I'll give you that much time if you don't try to make any trouble. And when you pack up your things, take care you don't pick up anything that belongs to me. Or I'll have the law on you.'

Uncle Abe grew weak so quickly that he barely managed to keep from falling. He turned a little and slid down the side of the door and sat on the crib floor. Luther looked around to see what he was doing.

'I'm past sixty,' Uncle Abe said slowly, 'but me and my family works hard for you, Mr. Luther. We work as hard as anybody on

your whole place. You know that's true, Mr. Luther. I've lived here, working for you, and your daddy before you, for all of forty years. I never mentioned to you about the shares, no matter how big the crop was that I raised for you. I've never asked much, just enough to eat and a few clothes, that's all. I raised up a houseful of children to help work, and none of them ever made any trouble for you, did they, Mr. Luther?'

Luther waved his arm impatiently indicating that he wanted the Negro to stop arguing. He shook his head, showing that he did not want to listen to anything Uncle Abe had to say.

'That's all true enough,' Luther said, 'but I've got to get rid of half the tenants on my place. I can't afford to keep eight or ten old people like you here any longer. All of you will have to move off and go somewhere else.'

'Ain't you going to farm this year, and raise cotton, Mr. Luther?' Uncle Abe asked. 'I can still work as good and hard as anybody else. It may take me a little longer sometimes, but I get the work done. Ain't I shucking this corn to feed the mules as good as anybody else could do?'

'I haven't got time to stand here and argue with you,' Luther said nervously. 'My mind is made up, and that's all there is to it. Now, you go on home as soon as you finish feeding the mules and start packing the things that belong to you like I told you.'

Luther turned away and started walking down the path toward the barn. When he got as far as the barnyard gate, he turned around and looked back. Uncle Abe had followed him.

'Where can me and my family move to, Mr. Luther?' Uncle Abe said. 'The boys are big enough to take care of themselves. But me and my wife have grown old. You know how hard it is for an old coloured man like me to go out and find a house and land to work on shares. It don't cost you much to keep us, and me and my boys raise as much cotton as anybody else. The last time I mentioned to you about the shares has been a long way in the past, thirty years or more. I'm just content to work like I do and get some rations and a few clothes. You know that's true, Mr. Luther. I've lived in my little shanty over there for all of forty

years, and it's the only home I've got. Mr. Luther, me and my wife is both old now, and I can't hire out to work by the day, because I don't have the strength any more. But I can still grow cotton as good as any other coloured man in the country.'

Luther opened the barnyard gate and walked through it. He shook his head as though he was not even going to listen any longer. He turned his back on Uncle Abe and walked away.

Uncle Abe did not know what to say or do after that. When he saw Luther walk away, he became shaky all over. He clutched at the gate for something to hold on to.

'I just can't move away, Mr. Luther,' he said desperately. 'I just can't do that. This is the only place I've got to live in the world. I just can't move off, Mr. Luther.'

Luther walked out of sight around the corner of the barn. He did not hear Uncle Abe after that.

The next day, at a little after two o'clock in the afternoon, a truck drove up to the door of the three-room house where Uncle Abe, his wife, and their three grown sons lived. Uncle Abe and his wife were sitting by the fire trying to keep warm in the winter cold. They were the only ones at home then.

Uncle Abe heard the truck drive up and stop, but he sat where he was, thinking it was his oldest boy, Henry, who drove a truck sometimes for Luther Bolick.

After several minutes had passed, somebody knocked on the door, and his wife got up right away and went to see who it was.

There were two strange white men on the porch when she opened the door. They did not say anything at first, but looked inside the room to see who was there. Still not saying anything, they came inside and walked to the fireplace where Uncle Abe sat hunched over the hearth.

'Are you Abe Lathan?' one of the men, the oldest, asked.

'Yes, sir, I'm Abe Lathan,' he answered, wondering who they were, because he had never seen them before. 'Why do you want to know that?'

The man took a bright metal disk out of his pocket and held it in the palm of his hand before Uncle Abe's eyes.

'I'm serving a paper and a warrant on you,' he said. 'One is an eviction, and the other is for threatening to do bodily harm.'

He unfolded the eviction notice and handed it to Uncle Abe. The Negro shook his head bewilderedly, looking first at the paper and finally up at the two strange white men.

'I'm a deputy,' the older man said, 'and I've come for two things — to evict you from this house and to put you under arrest.'

'What does that mean — evict?' Uncle Abe asked.

The two men looked around the room for a moment. Uncle Abe's wife had come up behind his chair and put trembling hands on his shoulder.

'We are going to move your furniture out of this house and carry it off the property of Luther Bolick. Then, besides that, we're going to take you down to the county jail. Now, come on and hurry up, both of you.'

Uncle Abe got up, and he and his wife stood on the hearth not knowing what to do.

The two men began gathering up the furniture and carrying it out of the house. They took the beds, tables, chairs, and everything else in the three rooms except the cook-stove, which belonged to Luther Bolick. When they got all the things outside, they began piling them into the truck.

Uncle Abe went outside in front of the house as quickly as he could.

'White folks, please don't do that,' he begged. 'Just wait a minute while I go find Mr. Luther. He'll set things straight. Mr. Luther is my landlord, and he won't let you take all my furniture away like this. Please, sir, just wait while I go find him.'

The two men looked at each other.

'Luther Bolick is the one who signed these papers,' the deputy said, shaking his head. 'He was the one who got these court orders to carry off the furniture and put you in jail. It wouldn't do you a bit of good to try to find him now.'

'Put me in jail?' Uncle Abe said. 'What did he say to do that for?'

'For threatening bodily harm,' the deputy said. 'That's for

threatening to kill him. Hitting him with a stick or shooting him with a pistol.'

The men threw the rest of the household goods into the truck and told Uncle Abe and his wife to climb into the back. When they made no effort to get in, the deputy pushed them to the rear and prodded them until they climbed into the truck.

While the younger man drove the truck, the deputy stood beside them in the body so they could not escape. They drove out the lane, past the other tenant houses, and then down the long road that went over the hill through Luther Bolick's land to the public highway. They passed the big white house where he lived, but he was not within sight.

'I never threatened to harm Mr. Luther,' Uncle Abe protested. 'I never did a thing like that in my whole life. I never said a mean thing about him, either. Mr. Luther is my boss, and I've worked for him ever since I was twenty years old. Yesterday he said he wanted me to move off his farm, and all I did was say that I thought he ought to let me stay. I won't have much longer to live, anyway. I told him I didn't want to move off. That's all I said to Mr. Luther. I ain't never said I was going to try to kill him. Mr. Luther knows that as well as I do. You ask Mr. Luther if that ain't so.'

They had left Luther Bolick's farm, and had turned down the highway toward the county seat, eleven miles away.

'For more than forty years I've lived here and worked for Mr. Luther,' Uncle Abe said, 'and I ain't never said a mean thing to his face or behind his back in all that time. He furnishes me with rations for me and my family, and a few clothes, and me and my family raise cotton for him, and I been doing that ever since I was twenty years old. I moved here and started working on shares for his daddy first, and then when he died, I kept right on like I have up to now. Mr. Luther knows I've worked hard and never answered him back, and only asked for rations and a few clothes all this time. You ask Mr. Luther.'

The deputy listened to all that Uncle Abe said, but he did not say anything himself. He felt sorry for the old Negro and his wife,

but there was nothing he could do about it. Luther Bolick had driven to the courthouse early that morning and secured the papers for eviction and arrest. It was his job to serve the papers and execute the court orders. But even if it was his job, he could not keep from feeling sorry for the Negroes. He didn't think that Luther Bolick ought to throw them off his farm just because they had grown old.

When they got within sight of town, the deputy told the driver to stop. He drew the truck up beside the highway when they reached the first row of houses. There were fifteen or eighteen Negro houses on both sides of the road.

After they had stopped, the two white men began unloading the furniture and stacking it beside the road. When it was all out of the truck, the deputy told Uncle Abe's wife to get out. Uncle Abe started to get out, too, but the deputy told him to stay where he was. They drove off again, leaving Uncle Abe's wife standing in a dazed state of mind beside the furniture.

'What you going to do with me now?' Uncle Abe asked, looking back at his wife and furniture in the distance.

'Take you to the county jail and lock you up,' the deputy said.

'What's my wife going to do?' he asked.

'The people in one of those houses will probably take her in.'

'How long will you keep me in jail locked up?'

'Until your case comes up for trial.'

They drove through the dusty streets of the town, around the courthouse square, and stopped in front of a brick building with iron bars across the windows.

'Here's where we get out,' the deputy said.

Uncle Abe was almost too weak to walk by that time, but he managed to move along the path to the door. Another white man opened the door and told him to walk straight down the hall until he was told to stop.

Just before noon Saturday, Uncle Abe's oldest son, Henry, stood in Ramsey Clark's office, hat in hand. The lawyer looked at the Negro and frowned. He chewed his pencil for a while, then swung around in his chair and looked out the window into the

courthouse square. Presently he turned around and looked at Uncle Abe's son.

'I don't want the case,' he said. 'I don't want to touch it.'

The boy stared at him helplessly. It was the third lawyer he had gone to see that morning, and all of them had refused to take his father's case.

'There's no money in it,' Ramsey Clark said, still frowning.

'I'd never get a dime out of you niggers if I took this case. And, besides, I don't want to represent any more niggers at court. Better lawyers than me have been ruined that way. I don't want to get the reputation of being a "nigger lawyer."'

Henry shifted the weight of his body from one foot to the other and bit his lips. He did not know what to say. He stood in the middle of the room trying to think of a way to get help for his father.

'My father never said he was going to kill Mr. Luther,' Henry protested. 'He's always been on friendly terms with Mr. Luther. None of us have ever given Mr. Luther any trouble. Anybody will tell you that. All the other tenants on Mr. Luther's place will tell you my father has always stood up for Mr. Luther. He never said he would try to hurt Mr. Luther in any way.'

The lawyer waved for him to stop. He had heard all he wanted to listen to.

'I told you I wouldn't touch the case,' he said angrily, snatching up papers and slamming them down on his desk. 'I don't want to go into court and waste my time arguing a case that won't make any difference one way or the other, anyway. It's a good thing for you niggers to get a turn on the gang every once in a while. It doesn't make any difference whether Abe Lathan threatened Mr. Bolick, or whether he didn't threaten him. Abe Lathan said he wasn't going to move off the farm after Mr. Bolick had told him to, didn't he? Well, that's enough to convict him in court. When the case comes up for trial, that's all the judge will want to hear. He'll be sent to the gang quicker than a flea can hop. No lawyer is going to spend a lot of time preparing a case when he knows how it's going to end. If there was money in it, it might be different

But you niggers don't have a thin dime to pay me with. No, I don't want the case. I wouldn't touch it with a ten-foot pole.'

Henry backed out of Ramsey Clark's office and went to the jail. He secured permission to see his father for five minutes.

Uncle Abe was sitting on his bunk in the cage looking through the bars when Henry entered. The jailor came and stood behind him at the cage door.

'Did you see a lawyer and tell him I never said anything like that to Mr. Luther?' Uncle Abe asked the first thing.

Henry looked at his father, but it was difficult for him to answer. He shook his head, dropping his gaze until he could see only the floor.

'You tried, didn't you, Henry?' Uncle Abe asked.

Henry nodded.

'But when you told the lawyers how I never said a mean thing about Mr. Luther, or his daddy before him, in all my whole life, didn't they say they would help me get out of jail?'

Henry shook his head.

'What did the lawyers say, Henry? When you told them how respectful I've always been to Mr. Luther, and how I've always worked hard for him all my life, and never mentioned to him about the shares, didn't they say they would help me then?'

Henry looked up at his father, moving his head sideways in order to see him between the bars of the cage. He had to swallow hard several times before he could speak at all.

'I've already been to see three lawyers,' he said finally. 'All of them said they couldn't do anything about it, and to just go ahead and let it come up for trial. They said there wasn't anything they could do, because the judge would give you a term on the gang, anyway.'

He stopped for a moment, looking down at his father's feet through the bars.

'If you want me to, I'll go see if I can try to find some other lawyers to take the case. But it won't do much good. They just won't do anything.'

Uncle Abe sat down on his bunk and looked at the floor. He could not understand why none of the lawyers would help him.

Presently he looked up through the bars at his son. His eyes were fast filling with tears that he could not control.

'Why did the lawyers say the judge would give me a term on the gang, anyway, Henry?'

Henry gripped the bars, thinking about all the years he had seen his father and mother working in the cotton fields for Luther Bolick and being paid in rations, a few clothes, and a house to live in, and nothing more.

'Why did they say that, Henry?' his father insisted.

'I reckon because we are coloured folks,' Henry said at last. 'I don't know why else they would say things like that.'

The jailor moved up behind Henry, prodding him with his stick. 'Hurry along,' the jailor kept saying. 'Time's up! Time's up!' Henry walked down the hall between the rows of cages towards the door that led to the street. He did not look back.

Getting on in the World

BY MORLEY CALLAGHAN

(From *The American Mercury*)

THAT night in the tavern of the Clairmont Hotel, Henry Forbes was working away at his piano and there was the usual good crowd of brokers and politicians and sporting men sitting around drinking with their well-dressed women. A tall, good-natured boy in the bond business, and his girl, had just come up to the little green piano, and Henry had let them amuse themselves playing a few tunes, and then he had sat down himself again and had run his hand the length of the keyboard. When he looked up there was this girl leaning on the piano and beaming at him.

She was about eighteen and tall and wearing one of those sheer black dresses and a little black hat with a veil, and when she moved around to speak to him he saw that she had the swellest legs and an eager, straightforward manner.

'I'm Tommy Gorman's sister,' she said.

'Why, say . . . you're —'

'Sure. I'm Jean,' she said.

'Where did you come from?'

'Back home in Buffalo,' she said. 'Tommy told me to be sure and look you up first thing.'

Tommy Gorman had been his chum; he used to come into the tavern almost every night to see him before he got consumption and had to go home. So it did not seem so surprising to see his sister standing there instead. He got her a chair and let her sit beside him. And in no time he saw that Tommy must have made him out to be a pretty glamorous figure. She understood that he knew everybody in town, that big sporting men like Jake Solloway often gave him tips on the horses, and that a man like Eddie Convey, who just about ran the city hall and was one of the hotel

owners, too, called him by his first name. In fact Tommy had even told her that the job playing the piano wasn't much, but that bumping into so many big people every night he was apt to make a connection at any time and get a political job, or something in a stockbroker's office.

The funny part of it was she seemed to have joined herself to him at once; her eyes were glowing, and as he watched her swinging her head around looking at the important clients, he simply couldn't bear to tell her that the management had decided that the piano wouldn't be necessary any more and that he mightn't be there more than two weeks.

So he sat there pointing out people she might have read about in the newspapers. It all came out glibly, as if each one of them was an old friend, yet he actually felt lonely each time he named somebody. 'That's Thompson over there with the horn-rimmed glasses. He's the mayor's secretary,' he said. 'That's Bill. Bill Henry over there. You know, the producer. Swell guy, Bill.' And then he rose up in his chair. 'Say, look, there's Eddie Convey,' he said. As he pointed he got excited, for the big, fresh-faced, hawk-nosed Irishman with the protruding blue eyes and the big belly had seen him pointing. He was grinning. And then he raised his right hand a little.

'Is he a friend of yours?' Jean asked.

'Sure he is. Didn't you see for yourself,' he said. But his heart was leaping. It was the first time Eddie Convey had ever gone out of his way to notice him. Then the world his job might lead to seemed to open up again and he started chattering breathlessly about Convey, thinking all the time, beneath his chatter, that if he could go to Convey and get one little word from him, and if something bigger couldn't be found for him he at least could keep his job.

He became so voluble and excited that he didn't notice how delighted she was with him till it was time to take her home. She was living uptown in a rooming house where there were a lot of theatrical people. When they were sitting on the stone step a minute before she went in she told him that she had enough money

saved up to last her about a month. She wanted to get a job modelling in a department store. Then he put his arm around her and there was a soft glowing wonder in her face.

'It seems like I've known you for years,' she said.

'I guess that's because we both know Tommy.'

'Oh, no,' she said. Then she let him kiss her hard. And as she ran into the house she called that she'd be around to the tavern again.

It was as if she had been dreaming about him without ever having seen him. She had come running to him with her arms wide open. 'I guess she's about the softest touch that's come my way,' he thought, going down the street. But it looked too easy. It didn't require any ambition, and he was a little ashamed of the sudden, weakening tenderness he felt for her.

She kept coming around every night after that and sat there while he played the piano and sometimes sang a song. When he was through for the night, it didn't matter to her whether they went any place in particular, so he would take her home. Then they got into the habit of going to his room for a while. As he watched her fussing around, straightening the room up or maybe making a cup of coffee, he often felt like asking her what made her think she could come bouncing into town and fit into his life. But when she was listening eagerly, and kept sucking in her lower lip and smiling slowly, he felt indulgent with her. He felt she wanted to hang around because she was impressed with him.

It was the same when she was sitting around with him in the tavern. She used to show such enthusiasm that it became embarrassing. You like a girl with you to look like some of the smart blondes who came into the place and have that lazy, half-mocking aloofness that you have to try desperately to break through. With Jean laughing and talking a lot and showing all her straightforward warm eagerness people used to turn and look at her as if they'd like to reach out their hands and touch her. It made Henry feel that the pair of them looked like a couple of kids on a merry-go-round. Anyway, all that excitement of hers seemed to

be only something that went with the job, so in the last couple of nights, with the job fading, he hardly spoke to her and got a little savage pleasure out of seeing how disappointed she was.

She didn't know what was bothering him till Thursday night. A crowd from the theatre had come in, and Henry was feeling blue. Then he saw Eddie Convey and two middle-aged men who looked like brokers sitting at a table in the corner. When Convey seemed to smile at him, he thought bitterly that when he lost his job people like Convey wouldn't even know him on the street. Convey was still smiling, and then he actually beckoned.

'Gees, is he calling me?' he whispered.

'Who?' Jean asked.

'The big guy, Convey,' he whispered. So he wouldn't make a fool of himself he waited till Convey called a second time. Then he got up nervously and went over to him. 'Yes, Mr. Convey,' he said.

'Sit down, son,' Convey said. His arrogant face was full of expansive indulgence as he looked at Henry and asked, 'How are you doing around here?'

'Things don't exactly look good,' he said. 'Maybe I won't be around here much longer.'

'Oh, stop worrying, son. Maybe we'll be able to fix you up.'

'Gee, thanks, Mr. Convey.' It was all so sudden and exciting that Henry kept on bobbing his head, 'Yes, Mr. Convey.'

'How about the kid over there,' Convey said, nodding toward Jean. 'Isn't it a little lonely for her sitting around?'

'Well, she seems to like it, Mr. Convey.'

'She's a nice-looking kid. Sort of fresh and — well . . . uh, fresh, that's it.' They both turned and looked over at Jean, who was watching them, her face excited and wondering.

'Maybe she'd like to go to a party at my place,' Convey said.

'I'll ask her, Mr. Convey.'

'Why don't you tell her to come along, see. You know, the Plaza, in about an hour. I'll be looking for her.'

'Sure, Mr. Convey,' he said. He was astonished that Convey wanted him to do something for him. 'It's a pleasure,' he wanted to say. But for some reason it didn't come out.

'Okay,' Convey said, and turned away, and Henry went back to his chair at the piano.

'What are you so excited about?' Jean asked him.

His eyes were shining as he looked at her little black hat and the way she held her head to one side as if she had just heard something exhilarating. He was trying to see what it was in her that had suddenly joined him to Convey. 'Can you beat it!' he blurted out. 'He wants you to go up to a party at his place.'

'Me?'

'Yeah, you.'

'What about you?'

'He knows I've got to stick around here, and, besides, there may be a lot of important people around there, and there's always room at Convey's parties for a couple of more girls.'

'I'd rather stay here with you,' she said.

Then they stopped whispering because Convey was going out, the light catching his bald spot.

'You got to do things like that,' Henry coaxed her. 'Why, there isn't a girl around here who wouldn't give her front teeth to be asked up to his place.'

She let him go on telling her how important Convey was and when he had finished, she asked, 'Why do I have to? Why can't we just go over to your place?'

'I didn't tell you. I didn't want you to know, but it looks like I'm through around here. Unless Convey, or somebody like that, steps in I'm washed up,' he said. He took another ten minutes telling her all the things Convey could do for people.

'All right,' she said. 'If you think we have to.' But she seemed to be deeply troubled. She waited while he went over to the head waiter and told him he'd be gone for an hour, and then they went out and got a cab. On the way up to Convey's place she kept quiet, with the same troubled look on her face. When they got to the apartment house and they were standing on the pavement, she turned to him. 'Oh, Henry, I don't want to go up there.'

'It's just a little thing. It's just a party,' he said.

'All right. If you say so, okay,' she said. Then she suddenly

threw her arms around him. It was a little crazy because he found himself hugging her tight too. 'I love you,' she said. 'I knew I was going to love you when I came.' Her cheek, brushing against his, felt wet. Then she broke away.

As he watched her running in past the doorman that embarrassing tenderness he had felt on other nights touched him again, only it didn't flow softly by him this time. It came like a swift stab.

In the tavern he sat looking at the piano, and his heart began to ache, and he turned around and looked at all the well-fed men and their women and he heard their deep-toned voices and their lazy laughter and he suddenly felt corrupt. Never in his life had he had such a feeling. He kept listening and looking into these familiar faces and he began to hate them as if they were to blame for blinding him to what was so beautiful and willing in Jean. He couldn't sit there. He got his hat and went out and started to walk up to Convey's.

Over and over he told himself he would go right up to Convey's door and ask for her. But when he got to the apartment house and was looking up at the patches of light, he felt timid. It made it worse that he didn't even know which window, which room was Convey's. She seemed lost to him. So he walked up and down past the doorman, telling himself she would soon come running out and throw her arms around him when she found him waiting.

It got very late. Hardly anyone came from the entrance. The doorman quit for the night. Henry ran out of cigarettes, but he was scared to leave the entrance. Then the two broker friends of Convey's came out, with two loud-talking girls, and they called a cab and all got in and went away. 'She's staying. She's letting him keep her up there. I'd like to beat her. What does she think she is?' he thought. He was so sore at her that he exhausted himself, and then felt weak and wanted to sit down.

When he saw her coming out, it was nearly four o'clock in the morning. He had walked about ten paces away, and turned, and there she was on the pavement, looking back at the building.

'Jean,' he called, and he rushed at her. When she turned, and he saw that she didn't look a bit worried, but blooming, lazy, and proud, he wanted to grab her and shake her.

'I've been here for hours,' he said. 'What were you doing up there? Everybody else has gone home.'

'Have they?' she said.

'So you stayed up there with him!' he shouted. 'Just like a tramp.'

She swung her hand and smacked him on the face. Then she took a step back, appraising him contemptuously. She suddenly laughed. 'On your way. Get back to your piano,' she said.

'All right, all right, you wait, I'll show you,' he muttered. 'I'll show everybody.' He stood watching her go down the street with a slow, self-satisfied sway of her body.

Hand Upon the Waters

BY WILLIAM FAULKNER

(From *The Saturday Evening Post*)

I

THE two men followed the path where it ran between the river and the dense wall of cypress and cane and gum and briar. One of them carried a gunnysack which had been washed and looked as if it had been ironed too. The other was a youth, less than twenty, by his face. The river was low, at mid-July level.

'He ought to been catching fish in this water,' the youth said.

'If he happened to feel like fishing,' the one with the sack said. 'Him and Joe run that line when Lonnie feels like it, not when the fish are biting.'

'They'll be on the line, anyway,' the youth said. 'I don't reckon Lonnie cares who takes them off for him.'

Presently the ground rose to a cleared point almost like a headland. Upon it sat a conical hut with a pointed roof, built partly of mildewed canvas and odd-shaped boards and partly of oil tins hammered out flat. A rusted stove-pipe projected crazily above it, there was a meagre woodpile and an axe, and a bunch of cane poles leaned against it. Then they saw, on the earth before the open door, a dozen or so short lengths of cord just cut from a spool near-by, and a rusted can half full of heavy fishhooks, some of which had already been bent on to the cords. But there was nobody there.

'The boat's gone,' the man with the sack said. 'So he ain't gone to the store.' Then he discovered that the youth had gone on, and he drew in his breath and was just about to shout when suddenly a man rushed out of the undergrowth and stopped, facing him and making an urgent whimpering sound—a man not large, but with tremendous arms and shoulders; an adult, yet with something

childlike about him, about the way he moved, barefoot, in battered overalls and with the urgent eyes of the deaf and dumb.

'Hi, Joe,' the man with the sack said, raising his voice as people will with those who they know cannot understand them. 'Where's Lonnie?' He held up the sack. 'Got some fish?'

But the other only stared at him, making that rapid whimpering. Then he turned and scuttled on up the path where the youth had disappeared, who, at that moment, shouted: 'Just look at this line!'

The older one followed. The youth was leaning eagerly out over the water beside a tree from which a light cotton rope slanted tautly downward into the water. The deaf-and-dumb man stood just behind him, still whimpering and lifting his feet rapidly in turn, though before the older man reached him he turned and scuttled back past him, toward the hut. At this stage of the river the line should have been clear of the water, stretching from bank to bank, between the two trees, with only the hooks on the dependent cords submerged. But now it slanted into the water from either end, with a heavy downstream sag, and even the older man could feel movement on it.

'It's big as a man!' the youth cried.

'Yonder's his boat,' the older man said. The youth saw it, too — across the stream and below them, floated into a willow clump inside a point. 'Cross and get it, and we'll see how big this fish is.'

The youth stepped out of his shoes and overalls and removed his shirt and waded out and began to swim, holding straight across to let the current carry him down to the skiff, and got the skiff and paddled back, standing erect in it and staring eagerly upstream toward the heavy sag of the line, near the centre of which the water, from time to time, roiled heavily with submerged movement. He brought the skiff in below the older man, who, at that moment, discovered the deaf-and-dumb man just behind him again, still making the rapid and urgent sound and trying to enter the skiff.

'Get back!' the older man said, pushing the other back with his arm. 'Get back, Joe!'

'Hurry up!' the youth said, staring eagerly toward the sub-

merged line, where, as he watched, something rolled sluggishly to the surface, then sank again. 'There's something on there, or there ain't a hog in Georgia. It's big as a man too!'

The older one stepped into the skiff. He still held the rope, and he drew the skiff, hand over hand, along the line itself.

Suddenly, from the bank of the river behind them, the deaf-and-dumb man began to make an actual sound. It was quite loud.

I I

'Inquest?' Stevens said.

'Lonnie Grinnup.' The coroner was an old country doctor. 'Two fellows found him drowned on his own trotline this morning.'

'No!' Stevens said. 'Poor damned feeb. I'll come out.' As county attorney he had no business there, even if it had not been an accident. He knew it. He was going to look at the dead man's face for a sentimental reason. What was now Yoknapatawpha County had been founded, not by one pioneer, but by three simultaneous ones. They came together on horseback, through the Cumberland Gap from the Carolinas, when Jefferson was still a Chickasaw Agency post, and bought land in the Indian patent and established families and flourished and vanished, so that now, a hundred years afterward, there was in all the county they helped to found but one representative of the three names.

This was Stevens, because the last of the Holston family had died before the end of the last century, and the Louis Grenier, whose dead face Stevens was driving eight miles in the heat of a July afternoon to look at, had never even known he was Louis Grenier. He could not even spell the Lonnie Grinnup he called himself — an orphan, too, like Stevens, a man a little under medium size and somewhere in his middle thirties, whom the whole county knew — the face which was almost delicate when you looked at it again, equable, constant, always cheerful, with an invariable fuzz of soft golden beard which had never known a razor, and light-coloured peaceful eyes — 'touched', they said, but whatever it was, had touched him lightly, taking not very much

away that need be missed — living, year in and year out, in the hovel he had built himself of an old tent and a few mismatched boards and flattened oil tins, with the deaf-and-dumb orphan he had taken into his hut ten years ago and clothed and fed and raised, and who had not even grown mentally as far as he himself had.

Actually his hut and trotline and fish trap were in almost the exact centre of the thousand and more acres his ancestors had once owned. But he never knew it.

Stevens believed he would not have cared, would have declined to accept the idea that any one man could or should own that much of the earth which belongs to all, to every man for his use and pleasure — in his own case, that thirty or forty square feet where his hut sat and the span of river across which his trotline stretched, where anyone was welcome at any time, whether he was there or not, to use his gear and eat his food as long as there was food.

And at times he would wedge his door shut against prowling animals and with his deaf-and-dumb companion he would appear without warning or invitation at houses or cabins ten and fifteen miles away, where he would remain for weeks, pleasant, equable, demanding nothing and without servility, sleeping wherever it was convenient for his hosts to have him sleep — in the hay of lofts, or in beds in family or company rooms, while the deaf-and-dumb youth lay on the porch or the ground just outside, where he could hear him who was brother and father both, breathing. It was one sound out of all the voiceless earth. He was infallibly aware of it.

It was early afternoon. The distances were blue with heat. Then, across the long flat where the highway began to parallel the river bottom, Stevens saw the store. By ordinary it would have been deserted, but now he could already see clotted about it the topless and battered cars, the saddled horses and mules and the wagons, the riders and drivers of which he knew by name. Better still, they knew him, voting for him year after year and calling him by his given name even though they did not quite understand him, just as they did not understand the Harvard Phi Beta Kappa key on his watch chain. He drew in beside the coroner's car.

Apparently it was not to be in the store, but in the grist mill beside it, before the open door of which the clean Saturday overalls and shirts and the bared heads and the sunburned necks striped with the white razor lines of Saturday neck shaves were densest and quietest. They made way for him to enter. There was a table and three chairs where the coroner and two witnesses sat.

Stevens noticed a man of about forty holding a clean gunnysack, folded and refolded until it resembled a book, and a youth whose face wore an expression of weary yet indomitable amazement. The body lay under a quilt on the low platform to which the silent mill was bolted. He crossed to it and raised the corner of the quilt and looked at the face and lowered the quilt and turned, already on his way back to town, and then he did not go back to town. He moved over among the men who stood along the wall, their hats in their hands, and listened to the two witnesses — it was the youth telling it in his amazed, spent, incredulous voice — finish describing the finding of the body. He watched the coroner sign the certificate and return the pen to his pocket, and he knew he was not going back to town.

'I reckon that's all,' the coroner said. He glanced toward the door. 'All right, Ike,' he said. 'You can take him now.'

Stevens moved aside with the others and watched the four men cross toward the quilt. 'You going to take him, Ike?' he said.

The eldest of the four glanced back at him for a moment. 'Yes. He had his burying money with Mitchell at the store.'

'You, and Pose, and Matthew, and Jim Blake,' Stevens said.

This time the other glanced back at him almost with surprise, almost impatiently.

'We can make up the difference,' he said.

'I'll help,' Stevens said.

'I thank you,' the other said. 'We got enough.'

Then the coroner was among them, speaking testily: 'All right, boys. Give them room.'

With the others, Stevens moved out into the air, the afternoon again. There was a wagon backed up to the door now which had

not been there before. Its tail gate was open, the bed was filled with straw, and with the others Stevens stood bareheaded and watched the four men emerge from the shed, carrying the quilt-wrapped bundle, and approach the wagon. Three or four others moved forward to help, and Stevens moved, too, and touched the youth's shoulder, seeing again that expression of spent and incredulous wild amazement.

'You went and got the boat before you knew anything' was wrong?' he said.

'That's right,' the youth said. He spoke quietly enough at first. 'I swam over and got the boat and rowed back. I knowed something was on the line. I could see it swagged —'

'You mean you swam the boat back,' Stevens said.

'—— down into the —— sir?'

'You swam the boat back? You swam over and got it and swam it back?'

'No, sir! I rowed the boat back. I rowed it straight back across! I never suspected nothing! I could see them fish —'

'What with?' Stevens said. The youth glared at him. 'What did you row it back with?'

'With the oar! I picked up the oar and rowed it right back, and all the time I could see them flopping around in the water. They didn't want to let go! They held on to him even after we hauled him up, still eating him! Fish were! I knowed turtles would, but these were fish! Eating him! Of course it was fish we thought was there! It was! I won't never eat another one! Never!'

It had not seemed long, yet the afternoon had gone somewhere, taking some of the heat with it. Again in his car, his hand on the switch, Stevens sat looking at the wagon, now about to depart. And it's not right, he thought. It don't add. Something more that I missed, didn't see. Or something that hasn't happened yet.

The wagon was now moving, crossing the dusty banquette toward the highroad, with two men on the seat and the other two on saddled mules beside it. Stevens's hand turned the switch; the car was already in gear. It passed the wagon already going fast.

A mile down the road he turned into a dirt lane, back toward the hills. It began to rise, the sun intermittent now, for in places among the ridges sunset had already come. Presently the road forked. In the V of the fork stood a church, white-painted and steepleless, beside an unfenced straggle of cheap marble headstones and other graves outlined only by rows of inverted glass jars and crockery and broken brick.

He did not hesitate. He drove up beside the church and turned and stopped the car facing the fork and the road over which he had just come where it curved away and vanished. Because of the curve, he could hear the wagon for some time before he saw it, then he heard the truck. It was coming down out of the hills behind him, fast, sweeping into sight, already slowing — a cab, a shallow bed with a tarpaulin spread over it.

It drew out of the road at the fork and stopped; then he could hear the wagon again, and then he saw it and the two riders came around the curve in the dusk, and there was a man standing in the road beside the truck now, and Stevens recognized him: Tyler Ballenbaugh — a farmer, married and with a family and a reputation for self-sufficiency and violence, who had been born in the county and went out West and returned, bringing with him, like an effluvium, rumours of sums he had won gambling, who had married and bought land and no longer gambled at cards, but on certain years would mortgage his own crop and buy or sell cotton futures with the money — standing in the road beside the wagon, tall in the dusk, talking to the men in the wagon without raising his voice or making any gesture. Then there was another man beside him, in a white shirt, whom Stevens did not recognize or look at again.

His hand dropped to the switch; again the car was in motion with the sound of the engine. He turned the headlights on and dropped rapidly down out of the churchyard and into the road and up behind the wagon as the man in the white shirt leaped on to the running board, shouting at him, and Stevens recognized him too: a younger brother of Ballenbaugh's, who had gone to Memphis years ago, where it was understood he had been a hired armed

guard during a textile strike, but who, for the last two or three years, had been at his brother's, hiding, it was said, not from the police, but from some of his Memphis friends or later business associates. From time to time his name made one in reported brawls and fights at country dances and picnics. He was subdued and thrown into jail once by two officers in Jefferson, where, on Saturdays, drunk, he would brag about his past exploits or curse his present luck and the older brother who made him work about the farm.

'Who in hell you spying on?' he shouted.

'Boyd,' the other Ballenbaugh said. He did not even raise his voice. 'Get back in the truck.' He had not moved — a big sombre-faced man who stared at Stevens out of pale, cold, absolutely expressionless eyes. 'Howdy, Gavin,' he said.

'Howdy, Tyler,' Stevens said. 'You going to take Lonnie?'

'Does anybody here object?'

'I don't,' Stevens said, getting out of the car. 'I'll help you swap him.'

Then he got back into the car. The wagon moved on. The truck backed and turned, already gaining speed; the two faces fled past — the one which Stevens saw now was not truculent, but frightened; the other, in which there was nothing at all save the still, cold, pale eyes. The cracked tail lamp vanished over the hill. That was an Okatoba County licence number, he thought.

Lonnie Grinnup was buried the next afternoon, from Tyler Ballenbaugh's house.

Stevens was not there. 'Joe wasn't there, either, I suppose,' he said. 'Lonnie's dummy.'

'No. He wasn't there, either. The folks that went in to Lonnie's camp on Sunday morning to look at that trotline said that he was still there, hunting for Lonnie. But he wasn't at the burying. When he finds Lonnie this time, he can lie down by him, but he won't hear him breathing.'

'No,' Stevens said.

III

He was in Mottstown, the seat of Okatoba County, on that afternoon. And although it was Sunday, and although he would not know until he found it just what he was looking for, he found it before dark — the agent for the company which, eleven years ago, had issued to Lonnie Grinnup a five-thousand-dollar policy, with double indemnity for accidental death, on his life, with Tyler Ballenbaugh as beneficiary.

It was quite correct. The examining doctor had never seen Lonnie Grinnup before, but he had known Tyler Ballenbaugh for years, and Lonnie had made his mark on the application and Ballenbaugh had paid the first premium and kept them up ever since.

There had been no particular secrecy about it other than transacting the business in another town, and Stevens realized that even that was not unduly strange.

Okatoba County was just across the river, three miles from where Ballenbaugh lived, and Stevens knew of more men than Ballenbaugh who owned land in one county and bought their cars and trucks and banked their money in another, obeying the country-bred man's inherent, possibly atavistic, faint distrust, perhaps, not of men in white collars, but of paving and electricity.

'Then I'm not to notify the company yet?' the agent asked.

'No. I want you to accept the claim when he comes in to file it, explain to him it will take a week or so to settle it, wait three days and send him word to come in to your office to see you at nine o'clock or ten o'clock the next morning; don't tell him why, what for. Then telephone me at Jefferson when you know he has got the message.'

Early the next morning, about daybreak, the heat wave broke. He lay in bed watching and listening to the crash and glare of lightning and the rain's loud fury, thinking of the drumming of it and the fierce channelling of clay-coloured water across Lonnie Grinnup's raw and kinless grave in the barren hill beside the steepleless church, and of the sound it would make, above the turmoil of the rising river, on the tin-and-canvas hut where the

deaf-and-dumb youth probably still waited for him to come home, knowing that something had happened, but not how, not why. Not how, Stevens thought. They fooled him some way. They didn't even bother to tie him up. They just fooled him.

On Wednesday night he received a telephone message from the Mottstown agent that Tyler Ballenbaugh had filed his claim.

'All right,' Stevens said. 'Send him the message Monday, to come in Tuesday. And let me know when you know he has got it.' He put the phone down. I am playing stud poker with a man who has proved himself a gambler, which I have not, he thought. But at least I have forced him to draw a card. And he knows who is in the pot with him.

So when the second message came, on the following Monday afternoon, he knew only what he himself was going to do. He had thought once of asking the sheriff for a deputy, or of taking some friend with him. But even a friend would not believe that what I have is a hole card, he told himself, even though I do: that one man, even an amateur at murder, might be satisfied that he had cleaned up after himself. But when there are two of them, neither one is going to be satisfied that the other has left no ravellings.

So he went alone. He owned a pistol. He looked at it and put it back into its drawer. At least nobody is going to shoot me with that,' he told himself. He left town just after dusk.

This time he passed the store, dark at the roadside. When he reached the lane into which he had turned nine days ago, this time he turned to the right and drove on for a quarter of a mile and turned into a littered yard, his headlights full upon a dark cabin. He did not turn them off. He walked full in the yellow beam, toward the cabin, shouting: 'Nate! Nate!'

After a moment a Negro voice answered, though no light showed.

'I'm going in to Mr. Lonnie Grinnup's camp. If I'm not back by daylight, you better go up to the store and tell them.'

There was no answer. Then a woman's voice said: 'You come on away from that door!' The man's voice murmured something.

'I can't help it!' the woman cried. 'You come away and let them white folks alone!'

So there are others besides me, Stevens thought, thinking how, quite often, almost always, there is in Negroes an instinct, not for evil, but to recognize evil at once when it exists. He went back to the car and snapped off the lights and took his flashlight from the seat.

He found the truck. In the close-held beam of the light he read again the licence number which he had watched nine days ago flee over the hill. He snapped off the light and put it into his pocket.

Twenty minutes later he realized he need not have worried about the light. He was in the path, between the black wall of jungle and the river, he saw the faint glow inside the canvas wall of the hut and he could already hear the two voices — the one cold, level, and steady, the other harsh and high. He stumbled over the woodpile and then over something else and found the door and flung it back and entered the devastation of the dead man's house — the shuck mattresses dragged out of the wooden bunks, the overturned stove and scattered cooking vessels — where Tyler Ballenbaugh stood facing him with a pistol and the younger one stood half-crouched above an overturned box.

'Stand back, Gavin,' Ballenbaugh said.

'Stand back yourself, Tyler,' Stevens said. 'You're too late.'

The younger one stood up. Stevens saw recognition come into his face. 'Well, by ——' he said.

'Is it all up, Gavin?' Ballenbaugh said. 'Don't lie to me.'

'I reckon it is,' Stevens said. 'Put your pistol down.'

'Who else is with you?'

'Enough,' Stevens said. 'Put your pistol down, Tyler.'

'Hell,' the younger one said. He began to move; Stevens saw his eyes go swiftly from him to the door behind him. 'He's lying. There ain't anybody with him. He's just spying around like he was the other day, putting his nose into business he's going to wish he had kept it out of. Because this time it's going to get bit off.'

He was moving toward Stevens, stooping a little, his arms held slightly away from his sides.

'Boyd!' Tyler said. The other continued to approach Stevens, not smiling, but with a queer light, a glitter, in his face. 'Boyd!' Tyler said. Then he moved, too, with astonishing speed, and overtook the younger and with one sweep of his arm hurled him back into the bunk. They faced each other — the one cold, still, expressionless, the pistol held before him aimed at nothing, the other half-crouched, snarling.

'What the hell you going to do? Let him take us back to town like two damn sheep?'

'That's for me to decide,' Tyler said. He looked at Stevens. 'I never intended this, Gavin. I insured his life, kept the premiums paid — yes. But it was good business: if he had outlived me, I wouldn't have had any use for the money, and if I had outlived him, I would have collected on my judgment. There was no secret about it. It was done in open daylight. Anybody could have found out about it. Maybe he told about it. I never told him not to. And who's, to say against it anyway? I always fed him when he came to my house, he always stayed as long as he wanted to, come when he wanted to. But I never intended this.'

Suddenly the younger one began to laugh, half-crouched against the bunk where the other had flung him. 'So that's the tune,' he said. 'That's the way it's going.' Then it was not laughter any more, though the transition was so slight or perhaps so swift as to be imperceptible. He was standing now, leaning forward a little, facing his brother. 'I never insured him for five thousand dollars! I wasn't going to get —'

'Hush,' Tyler said.
'— five thousand dollars when they found him dead on that —'

Tyler walked steadily to the other and slapped him in two motions, palm and back, of the same hand, the pistol still held before him in the other.

'I said, hush, Boyd,' he said. He looked at Stevens again. 'I never intended this. I don't want that money now, even if they were going to pay it, because this is not the way I aimed for it to be. Not the way I bet. What are you going to do?'

'Do you need to ask that? I want an indictment for murder.'

'And then prove it!' the younger one snarled. 'Try and prove it! I never insured his life for —'

'Hush,' Tyler said. He spoke almost gently, looking at Stevens with the pale eyes in which there was absolutely nothing. 'You can't do that. It's a good name. Has been. Maybe nobody's done much for it yet, but nobody's hurt it bad yet, up to now. I have owed no man, I have taken nothing that was not mine. You mustn't do that, Gavin.'

'I mustn't do anything else, Tyler.'

The other looked at him. Stevens heard him draw a long breath and expel it. But his face did not change at all. 'You want your eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth.'

'Justice wants it. Maybe Lonnie Grinnup wants it. Wouldn't you?'

For a moment longer the other looked at him. Then Ballenbaugh turned and made a quiet gesture at his brother and another toward Stevens, quiet and peremptory.

Then they were out of the hut, standing in the light from the door; a breeze came up from somewhere and rustled in the leaves overhead and died away, ceased.

At first Stevens did not know what Ballenbaugh was about. He watched in mounting surprise as Ballenbaugh turned to face his brother, his hand extended, speaking in a voice which was actually harsh now: 'This is the end of the row. I was afraid from that night when you came home and told me. I should have raised you better, but I didn't. Here. Stand up and finish it.'

'Look out, Tyler!' Stevens said. 'Don't do that!'

'Keep out of this, Gavin. If it's meat for meat you want, you will get it.' He still faced his brother, he did not even glance at Stevens. 'Here,' he said. 'Take it and stand up.'

Then it was too late. Stevens saw the younger one spring back. He saw Tyler take a step forward and he seemed to hear in the other's voice the surprise, the disbelief, then the realization of the mistake. 'Drop the pistol, Boyd,' he said. 'Drop it.'

'So you want it back, do you?' the younger said. 'I come to you that night and told you you were worth five thousand dollars

as soon as somebody happened to look on that trotline, and asked you to give me ten dollars, and you turned me down. Ten dollars, and you wouldn't. Sure you can have it. Take it.' It flashed, low against his side; the orange fire lanced downward again as the other fell.

Now it's my turn, Stevens thought. 'They faced each other; he heard again that brief wind come from somewhere and shake the leaves overhead and fall still.

'Run while you can, Boyd,' he said. 'You've done enough. Run, now.'

'Sure I'll run. You do all your worrying about me now, because in a minute you won't have any worries. I'll run all right, after I've said a word to smart guys that come sticking their noses where they'll wish to hell they hadn't —'

Now he's going to shoot, Stevens thought, and he sprang. For an instant he had the illusion of watching himself springing, reflected somehow by the faint light from the river, that luminousness which water gives back to the dark, in the air above Boyd Ballenbaugh's head. Then he knew it was not himself he saw, it had not been wind he heard, as the creature, the shape which had no tongue and needed none, which had been waiting nine days now for Lonnie Grinnup to come home, dropped toward the murderer's back with its hands already extended and its body curved and rigid with silent and deadly purpose.

He was in the tree, Stevens thought. The pistol glared. He saw the flash, but he heard no sound.

I V

He was sitting on the veranda with his neat surgeon's bandage after supper when the sheriff of the county came up the walk — a big man, too, pleasant, affable, with eyes even paler and colder and more expressionless than Tyler Ballenbaugh's.

'It won't take but a minute,' he said, 'or I wouldn't have bothered you.'

'How bothered me?' Stevens said.

The sheriff lowered one thigh to the veranda rail. 'Head feel all right?'

'Feels all right,' Stevens said.

'That's good. I reckon you heard where we found Boyd.'

Stevens looked back at him just as blankly. 'I may have,' he said pleasantly. 'Haven't remembered much to-day but a headache.'

'You told us where to look. You were conscious when I got there. You were trying to give 'Tyler water. You told us to look on that trotline.'

'Did I? Well, well, what won't a man say, drunk or out of his head? Sometimes he's right too.'

'You were. We looked on the line, and there was Boyd hung on one of the hooks, dead, just like Lonnie Grinnup was. And Tyler Ballenbaugh with a broken leg and another bullet in his shoulder, and you with a crease in your skull you could hide a cigar in. How did he get on that trotline, Gavin?'

'I don't know,' Stevens said.

'All right. I'm not sheriff now. How did Boyd get on that trotline?'

'I don't know.'

The sheriff looked at him; they looked at each other. 'Is that what you answer any friend that asks?'

'Yes. Because I was shot, you see. I don't know.'

The sheriff took a cigar from his pocket and looked at it for a time. 'Joe — that deaf-and-dumb boy Lonnie raised — seems to have gone away at last. He was still around there last Sunday, but nobody has seen him since. He could have stayed. Nobody would have bothered him.'

'Maybe he missed Lonnie too much to stay,' Stevens said.

'Maybe he missed Lonnie.' The sheriff rose. He bit the end from the cigar and lit it. 'Did that bullet cause you to forget this too? Just what made you suspect something was wrong? What was it the rest of us seem to have missed?'

'It was that paddle,' Stevens said.

'Paddle?'

'Didn't you ever run a trotline, a trotline right at your camp? You don't paddle, you pull the boat hand over hand along the line itself from one hook to the next. Lónnie never did use his paddle; he even kept the skiff tied to the same tree his trotline was fastened to, and the paddle stayed in his house. If you had ever been there, you would have seen it. But the paddle was in the skiff when that boy found it.'

Under the Ridge

BY ERNEST HEMINGWAY

~~(From Cosmopolitan)~~

IN the heat of the day with the dust blowing, we came back, dry-mouthed, nose-clogged and heavy-loaded, down out of the battle to the long ridge above the river where the Spanish troops lay in reserve.

I sat down with my back against the shallow trench, my shoulders and the back of my head against the earth, clear now from even stray bullets, and looked at what lay below us in the hollow. There was the tank reserve, the tanks covered with branches chopped from olive trees. To their left were the staff cars, mud-daubed and branch-covered, and between the two a long line of men carrying stretchers wound down through the gap to where, on the flat at the foot of the ridge, ambulances were loading. Commissary mules loaded with sacks of bread and kegs of wine, and a train of ammunition mules, led by their drivers, were coming up the gap in the ridge, and men with empty stretchers were walking slowly up the trail with the mules.

To the right, below the curve of the ridge, I could see the entrance to the cave where the brigade staff was working, and their signalling wires ran out of the top of the cave and curved on over the ridge in the shelter of which we lay.

Motor-cyclists in leather suits and helmets came up and down the cut on their cycles or, where it was too steep, walking them, and leaving them beside the cut, walked over to the entrance to the cave and ducked inside. As I watched, a big Hungarian cyclist that I knew came out of the cave, tucked some papers in his leather wallet, walked over to his motor-cycle and, pushing it up through the stream of mules and stretcher-bearers, threw a leg over the saddle and roared on over the ridge, his machine churning a storm of dust.

Below, across the flat where the ambulances were coming and going, was the green foliage that marked the line of the river. There was a large house with a red tile roof and there was a grey stone mill, and from the trees around the big house beyond the river came the flashes of our guns. They were firing straight at us and there were the twin flashes, then the throaty, short *bung-bung* of the three-inch pieces and then the rising cry of the shells coming toward us and going on over our heads. As always, we were short of artillery. There were only four batteries down there, when there should have been forty, and they were firing only two guns at a time. The attack had failed before we came down.

'Are you Russians?' a Spanish soldier asked me.

'No, Americans,' I said. 'Have you any water?'

'Yes, comrade.' He handed over a pigskin bag. These troops in reserve were soldiers only in name and from the fact that they were in uniform. They were not intended to be used in the attack, and they sprawled along this line under the crest of the ridge, huddled in groups, eating, drinking and talking, or simply sitting dumbly, waiting. The attack was being made by an International Brigade.

We both drank. The water tasted of asphalt and pig bristles.

'Wine is better,' the soldier said. 'I will get wine.'

'Yes. But for the thirst, water.'

'There is no thirst like the thirst of battle. Even here, in reserve, I have much thirst.'

'That is fear,' said another soldier. 'Thirst is fear.'

'No,' said another. 'With fear there is thirst, always. But in battle there is much thirst even when there is no fear.'

'There is always fear in battle,' said the first soldier.

'For you,' said the second soldier.

'It is normal,' the first soldier said.

'For you.'

'Shut your dirty mouth,' said the first soldier. 'I am simply a man who tells the truth.'

It was a bright April day and the wind was blowing wildly so

that each mule that came up the gap raised a cloud of dust, and the two men at the ends of a stretcher each raised a cloud of dust that blew together and made one, and below, across the flat, long streams of dust moved out from the ambulances and blew away in the wind.

I felt quite sure I was not going to be killed on that day now, since we had done our work well in the morning, and twice during the early part of the attack we should have been killed and were not; and this had given me confidence. The first time had been when we had gone up with the tanks and picked a place from which to film the attack. Later I had a sudden distrust for the place and we had moved the cameras about two hundred yards to the left. Just before leaving, I had marked the place in quite the oldest way there is of marking a place, and within ten minutes a six-inch shell had lit on the exact place where I had been and there was no trace of any human being ever having been there. Instead, there was a large and clearly blasted hole in the earth.

Then, two hours later, a Polish officer, recently detached from the battalion and attached to the staff, had offered to show us the positions the Poles had just captured and, coming from under the lee of a fold of hill, we had walked into machine-gun fire that we had to crawl out from under with our chins tight to the ground and dust in our noses, and at the same time made the sad discovery that the Poles had captured no positions at all that day but were a little farther back than the place they had started from. And now, lying in the shelter of the trench, I was wet with sweat, hungry and thirsty and hollow inside from the now-finished danger of the attack.

'You are sure you are not Russians?' asked a soldier. 'There are Russians here to-day.'

'Yes. But we are not Russians.'

'You have the face of a Russian.'

'No,' I said. 'You are wrong, comrade. I have quite a funny face but it is not the face of a Russian.'

'He has the face of a Russian,' pointing at the other one of us who was working on a camera.

'Perhaps. But still he is not Russian. Where are you from?'

'Extremadura,' he said proudly.

'Are there any Russians in Extremadura?' I asked.

'No,' he told me, even more proudly. 'There are no Russians in Extremadura and there are no Extremadurans in Russia.'

'What are your politics?'

'I hate all foreigners,' he said.

'That's a broad political programme.'

'I hate the Moors, the English, the French, the Italians, the Germans, the North Americans and the Russians.'

'You hate them in that order?'

'Yes. But perhaps I hate the Russians the most.'

'Man, you have very interesting ideas,' I said. 'Are you a Fascist?'

'No. I am an Extremaduran and I hate foreigners.'

'He has very rare ideas,' said another soldier. 'Do not give him too much importance. Me, I like foreigners. I am from Valencia. Take another cup of wine, please.'

I reached up and took the cup, the other wine still brassy in my mouth. I looked at the Extremaduran. He was tall and thin. His face was haggard and unshaven, and his cheeks were sunken. He stood straight up in his rage, his blanket cape around his shoulders.

'Keep your head down,' I told him. 'There are many lost bullets coming over.'

'I have no fear of bullets and I hate all foreigners,' he said fiercely.

'You don't have to fear bullets,' I said, 'but you should avoid them when you are in reserve. It is not intelligent to be wounded when it can be avoided.'

'I am not afraid of anything,' the Extremaduran said.

'You are very lucky, comrade.'

'It's true,' the other, with the wine cup, said. 'He has no fear, not even of the *aviónes*.'

'He is crazy,' another soldier said. 'Everyone fears planes. They kill little but make much fear.'

'I have no fear. Neither of planes nor of nothing,' the Extremaduran said. 'And I hate every foreigner alive.'

Down the gap, walking beside two stretcher-bearers and seeming to pay no attention at all to where he was, came a tall man in International Brigade uniform with a blanket rolled over his shoulder and tied at his waist. His head was held high and he looked like a man walking in his sleep. He was middle-aged. He was not carrying a rifle, and, from where I lay, he did not look wounded.

I watched him walking alone down out of the war. Before he came to the staff cars he turned to the left and, his head still held high in that strange way, he walked over the edge of the ridge and out of sight.

The one who was with me, busy changing film in the hand cameras, had not noticed him.

A single shell came in over the ridge and fountained in dirt and black smoke just short of the tank reserve.

Someone put his head out of the cave where Brigade headquarters was and then disappeared inside. I thought it looked like a good place to go, but knew they would all be furious in there because the attack was a failure, and I did not want to face them. If an operation was successful they were happy to have motion pictures of it. But if it was a failure everyone was in such a rage there was always a chance of being sent back under arrest.

'They may shell us now,' I said.

'That makes no difference to me,' said the Extremaduran. I was beginning to be a little tired of the Extremaduran.

'Have you any more wine to spare?' I asked. My mouth was still dry.

'Yes, man. There are gallons of it,' the friendly soldier said. He was short, big-fisted and very dirty, with a stubble of beard about the same length as the hair on his cropped head. 'Do you think they will shell us now?'

'They should,' I said. 'But in this war you can never tell.'

'What is the matter with this war?' asked the Extremaduran angrily. 'Don't you like this war?'

'Shut up!' said the friendly soldier. 'I command here, and these comrades are our guests.'

'Then let him not talk against our war,' said the Extremaduran. 'No foreigners shall come here and talk against our war.'

'What town are you from, comrade?' I asked the Extremaduran.

'Badajoz,' he said. 'I am from Badajoz. In Badajoz, we have been sacked and pillaged and our women violated by the English, the French and now the Moors. What the Moors have done now is no worse than what the English did under Wellington. You should read history. My great-grandmother was killed by the English. The house where my family lived was burned by the English.'

'I regret it,' I said. 'Why do you hate the North Americans?'

'My father was killed by the North Americans in Cuba while he was there as a conscript.'

'I am sorry for that, too. Truly sorry. Believe me. And why do you hate the Russians?'

'Because they are the representatives of tyranny and I hate their faces. You have the face of a Russian.'

'Maybe we better get out of here,' I said to the one who was with me and who did not speak Spanish. 'It seems I have the face of a Russian and it's getting me into trouble.'

'I'm going to sleep,' he said. 'This is a good place. Don't talk so much and you won't get into trouble.'

'There's a comrade here that doesn't like me. I think he's an anarchist.'

'Well, watch out he doesn't shoot you, then. I'm going to sleep.'

Just then two men in leather coats, one short and stocky, the other of medium height, both with civilian caps, flat, high-cheekboned faces, wooden-holstered Mauser pistols strapped to their legs, came out of the gap and headed toward us.

The taller of them spoke to me in French. 'Have you seen a French comrade pass through here?' he asked. 'A comrade with a blanket tied around his shoulders in the form of a bandoleer?'

A comrade of about forty-five or fifty years old? Have you seen such a comrade going in the direction away from the front?’

‘No,’ I said. ‘I have not seen such a comrade.’

He looked at me a moment and I noticed his eyes were a greyish-yellow and that they did not blink at all.

‘Thank you, comrade,’ he said, in his odd French, and then spoke rapidly to the other man with him in a language I did not understand. They went off and climbed the highest part of the ridge, from where they could see down all the gullies.

‘There is the true face of Russians,’ the Extremaduran said.

‘Shut up!’ I said. I was watching the two men in the leather coats. They were standing there, under considerable fire, looking carefully over all the broken country below the ridge and toward the river.

Suddenly one of them saw what he was looking for, and pointed. Then the two started to run like hunting dogs, one straight down over the ridge, the other at an angle as though to cut someone off. Before the second one went over the crest I could see him drawing his pistol and holding it ahead of him as he ran.

‘And how do you like that?’ asked the Extremaduran.

‘No better than you,’ I said.

Over the crest of the parallel ridge I heard the Mausers’ jerky barking. They kept it up for more than a dozen shots. They must have opened fire at too long a range. After all the burst of shooting there was a pause and then a single shot.

The Extremaduran looked at me sullenly and said nothing. I thought it would be simpler if the shelling started. But it did not start.

The two in the leather coats and civilian caps came back over the ridge, walking together, and then down to the gap, walking downhill with that odd bent-kneed way of the two-legged animal coming down a steep slope. They turned up the gap as a tank came whirring and clanking down and moved to one side to let it pass.

The tanks had failed again that day, and the drivers coming down from the lines in their leather helmets, the tank turrets open

now as they came into the shelter of the ridge, had the straight-ahead stare of football players who have been removed from a game for yellowness.

The two flat-faced men in the leather coats stood by us on the ridge to let the tank pass.

'Did you find the comrade you were looking for?' I asked the taller one of them in French.

'Yes, comrade. Thank you,' he said and looked me over very carefully.

'What does he say?' the Extremaduran asked.

'He says they found the comrade they were looking for,' I told him. The Extremaduran said nothing.

We had been all that morning in the place the middle-aged Frenchman had walked out of. We had been there in the dust, the smoke, the noise, the receiving of wounds, the death, the fear of death, the bravery, the cowardice, the insanity and failure of an unsuccessful attack. We had been there on that ploughed field men could not cross and live. You dropped and lay flat; making a mount to shield your head; working your chin into the dirt; waiting for the order to go up that slope no man could go up and live.

We had been with those who lay there waiting for the tanks that did not come; waiting under the inrushing shriek and roaring crash of the shelling; the metal and the earth thrown like clods from a dirt fountain; and overhead the cracking, whispering fire like a curtain. We knew how those felt, waiting. They were as far forward as they could get. And men could not move farther and live, when the order came to move ahead.

We had been there all morning in the place the middle-aged Frenchman had come walking away from. I understood how a man might suddenly, seeing clearly the stupidity of dying in an unsuccessful attack; or suddenly seeing it clearly, as you can see clearly and justly before you die; seeing its hopelessness, seeing its idiocy, seeing how it really was, simply get back and walk away from it as the Frenchman had done. He could walk out of it not from cowardice, but simply from seeing too clearly; knowing

suddenly that he had to leave it; knowing there was no other thing to do.

The Frenchman had come walking out of the attack with great dignity and I understood him as a man. But, as a soldier, these other men who policed the battle had hunted him down, and the death he had walked away from had found him where he was just over the ridge, clear of the bullets and the shelling, and walking toward the river.

'And that,' the Extremaduran said to me, nodding toward the battle police.

'Is war,' I said. 'In war, it is necessary to have discipline.'

'And to live under that sort of discipline we should die?'

'Without discipline everyone will die anyway.'

'There is one kind of discipline and another kind of discipline,' the Extremaduran said. 'Listen to me. In February we were here where we are now and the Fascists attacked. They drove us from the hills that you Internationals tried to take to-day and that you could not take. We fell back to here; to this ridge. Internationals came up and took the line ahead of us.'

'I know that,' I said.

'But you do not know this,' he went on angrily. 'There was a boy from my province who became frightened during the bombardment, and he shot himself in the hand so that he could leave the line because he was afraid.'

The other soldiers were all listening now. Several nodded.

'Such people have their wounds dressed and are returned at once to the line,' the Extremaduran went on. 'It is just.'

'Yes,' I said. 'That is as it should be.'

'That is as it should be,' said the Extremaduran. 'But this boy shot himself so badly that the bone was all smashed and there surged up an infection and his hand was amputated.'

Several soldiers nodded.

'Go on, tell him the rest,' said one.

'It might be better not to speak of it,' said the cropped-headed, bristly-faced man who said he was in command.

'It is my duty to speak,' the Extremaduran said.

The one in command shrugged his shoulders. 'I did not like it either,' he said. 'Go on, then. But I do not like to hear it spoken of either.'

'This boy remained in the hospital in the valley since February,' the Extremaduran said. 'Some of us have seen him in the hospital. All say he was well liked in the hospital and made himself as useful as a man with one hand can be useful. Never was he under arrest. Never was there anything to prepare him.'

The man in command handed me the cup of wine again without saying anything. 'They were all listening; as men who cannot read or write listen to a story.'

'Yesterday, at the close of day, before we knew there was to be an attack. Yesterday, before the sun set, when we thought to-day was to be as any other day, they brought him up the trail in the gap there from the flat. We were cooking the evening meal and they brought him up. There were only four of them. Him, the boy Paco, those two you have just seen in the leather coats and the caps, and an officer from the Brigade. We saw the four of them climbing together up the gap, and we saw Paco's hands were not tied, nor was he bound in any way.'

'When we saw him we all crowded around and said, "Hello, Paco. How are you, Paco? How is everything, Paco, old boy, old Paco?"'

'Then he said, "Everything's all right. Everything is good except this" — and showed us the stump.'

'Paco said, "That was a cowardly and foolish thing. I am sorry that I did that thing. But I try to be useful with one hand. I will do what I can with one hand for the Cause."'

'Yes,' interrupted a soldier. 'He said that. I heard him say that.'

'We spoke with him,' the Extremaduran said. 'And he spoke with us. When such people with the leather coats and the pistols come it is always a bad omen in a war, as is the arrival of people with map cases and field glasses. Still we thought they had brought him for a visit, and all of us who had not been to the hospital were happy to see him, and as I say, it was the hour of the evening meal and the evening was clear and warm.'

'This wind only rose during the night,' a soldier said.

'Then,' the Extremaduran went on sombrely, 'one of *them* said to the officer in Spanish, "Where is the place?"

' "Where is the place this Paco was wounded?" asked the officer.'

'I answered him,' said the man in command. 'I showed the place. It is a little farther down than where you are.'

'Here is the place,' said a soldier. He pointed, and I could see it was the place. It showed clearly that it was the place.

'Then one of them led Paco by the arm to the place and held him there by the arm while the other spoke in Spanish. He spoke in Spanish, making many mistakes in the language. At first we wanted to laugh, and Paco started to smile. I could not understand all the speech, but it was that Paco must be punished as an example, in order that there would be no more self-inflicted wounds, and that all others would be punished in the same way.

'Then, while the one held Paco by the arm; Paco, looking very ashamed to be spoken of this way when he was already ashamed and sorry; the other took his pistol out and shot Paco in the back of the head without any word to Paco. Nor any word more.'

The soldiers all nodded.

'It was thus,' said one. 'You can see the place. He fell with his mouth there. You can see it.'

I had seen the place clearly enough from where I lay.

'He had no warning and no chance to prepare himself,' the one in command said. 'It was very brutal.'

'It is for this that I now hate Russians as well as all other foreigners,' said the Extremaduran. 'We can give ourselves no illusions about foreigners. If you are a foreigner, I am sorry. But for myself, now, I can make no illusions. You have eaten bread and drunk wine with us. Now I think you should go.'

'Do not speak in that way,' the man in command said to the Extremaduran. 'It is necessary to be formal.'

'I think we had better go,' I said.

'You are not angry?' the man in command said. 'You can stay in this shelter as long as you wish. Are you thirsty? Do you wish more wine?'

'Thank you very much,' I said. 'I think we had better go.'

'You understand my hatred?' asked the Extremaduran.

'I understand your hatred,' I said.

'Good,' he said and put out his hand. 'I do not refuse to shake hands. And that you, personally, have much luck.'

'Equally to you,' I said. 'Personally, and as a Spaniard.'

I woke the one who took the pictures and we started down the ridge toward Brigade headquarters. The tanks were all coming back now and you could hardly hear yourself talk for the noise.

'Were you talking all that time?'

'Listening.'

'Hear anything interesting?'

'Plenty.'

'What do you want to do now?'

'Get back to Madrid.'

'We should see the General.'

'Yes,' I said. 'We must.'

The General was coldly furious. He had been ordered to make the attack as a surprise with one brigade only, bringing everything up before daylight. It should have been made by at least a division. He had used three battalions and held one in reserve. The French tank commander had got drunk to be brave for the attack and finally was too drunk to function. He was to be shot when he sobered up.

The tanks had not come up in time and finally had refused to advance, and two of the battalions had failed to attain their objectives. The third had taken theirs, but it formed an untenable salient. The only real result had been a few prisoners, and these had been confided to the tank men to bring back and the tank men had killed them. The General had only failure to show, and they had killed his prisoners.

'What can I write on it?' I asked.

'Nothing that is not in the official communiqué. Have you any whisky in that long flask?'

'Yes.'

He took a drink and licked his lips carefully. He had once been

a captain of Hungarian Hussars, and he had once captured a gold train in Siberia when he was a leader of irregular cavalry with the Red Army and held it all one winter when the thermometer went down to forty below zero. We were good friends and he loved whisky, and he is now dead.

'Get out of here now,' he said. 'Have you transport?'

'Yes.'

'Did you get any pictures?'

'Some. The tanks.'

'The tanks,' he said bitterly. 'The swine. The cowards. Watch out you don't get killed,' he said. 'You are supposed to be a writer.'

'I can't write now.'

'Write it afterwards. You can write it all afterwards. And don't get killed. Especially, don't get killed. Now, get out of here.'

He could not take his own advice because he was killed two months later. But the oddest thing about that day was how marvellously the pictures we took of the tanks came out. On the screen they advanced over the hill irresistibly, mounting the crests like great ships, to crawl clanking on toward the illusion of victory we screened.

The nearest any man was to victory that day was probably the Frenchman who came, with his head held high, walking out of the battle. But his victory only lasted until he had walked half-way down the ridge. We saw him lying stretched out there on the slope of the ridge, still wearing his blanket, as we came walking down the cut to get into the staff car that would take us to Madrid.

That Fine Place We Had Last Year

BY RODERICK LULL

(From *Story*)

THAT' was a fine place we had last year. Just a few minutes ago the old man and I were talking about it. The old man was feeling pretty low, so I said, 'Cheer up, you remember that fine place we got last year this time? And had up until five-six months ago? Well, we'll get another place like that before long, better maybe. Whenever you feel droopy-like, you just think of that.'

'Yes, sir,' the old man said, 'that was a fine' place for sure.' He looked a hundred per cent better already and even smiled a little. He called in to the old woman. 'Hey, Ma, remember that place we had last year? Sure was a fine place.' And the old woman called back yes, she sure remembered, and I knew she felt better too. Even the kid quit bawling and sat up looking interested.

We hadn't felt so good last year when we got the place, though. It was just damn fool's luck. We'd come down through Oregon and Washington getting work on the farms during the picking season and we hadn't been able to save much money. The three of us made a dollar, maybe a dollar and a half apiece a day, and the kid made maybe fifty cents before he got the measles, but it all went pretty fast, what with the way they held us up for food and the clothes we had to buy and everything else. Then we hadn't got two hundred miles away when the heap broke down and it cost ten to get it fixed. That just about flattened us and here we were on the highway and the season all over.

The old woman was saying it was all up with us and the old man was agreeing with her and the kid was crying as usual. I was keeping quiet and feeling lousy when we ran out of gas, right in the middle of this little town. In some of these towns they'll give

you a little gas, enough to get you out of the county. I was figuring I might as well see if this was one of them when I saw a big man in boots and an old coat, that had been part of a plenty expensive suit, and a big hat, leaning against a nice new Buick and chewing on a cigar. Right away I guessed he was a rancher — in this country, ranching was the principal business. So without thinking I went over to him. Maybe I wouldn't have had the nerve if I'd stopped to think.

When I stopped in front of him he said, 'What do you want?'

'We're coming to work for you, me and the old man.'

He threw away the cigar and said, 'Nice of you to tell me. I suppose you got your pay all fixed?'

'Listen,' I said. 'Listen a minute, Mister. We ain't bums. We had a fine farm back in the Dakotas and we was good farmers. The dust drove us out but we're still good farmers. The old man's as good as he ever was and the old woman ain't bad herself in the off-time she gets from housekeeping. And you can see I'm not too frail. And we ain't asking favours, Mister, we put out anybody's money's worth.'

He said, 'How old are you, boy?'

'Nineteen.' Which was only lying by a year.

'You're a big kid.'

'A damn big kid.'

That's how we got the place. His name was Fentrup and there was more talk with the old man of course, but I think his mind was made up right then. The upshot was he said he had a little place, a couple of hundred acres, and right now there was nobody on it. There was a fair house and some fencing to be done and the barn needed attention, and if he could get responsible people he'd graze some of his stock on it a while. If they turned out to be not responsible, of course, they'd be booted off so damn quick — and then he looked at the old woman and stopped. But you could see he meant it.

'You aren't gambling here, Mister,' I said.

So he turned to the old man and said, 'Fifty bucks a month. That buys plenty groceries. Take it or leave it. And why the hell

I'm doing this with complete strangers is news to me. This kid of yours here, the big one, he must be cut out for a salesman. Maybe you ought to get a line of trick can openers and put him on the road.'

The old man didn't say anything for a minute. Finally he wiped some sweat off his forehead, though it wasn't a hot day, and said, 'Cash?' in a little weak voice.

'Naturally. What do you think? Wampum?'

'Well,' the old man said, 'I didn't know. Some places it's script you can use at company stores. That ain't so hot.'

'Cash is my talk,' Mr. Fentrup said, and I could see he was that kind of a man.

He gave the old man twenty dollars in advance and the old man gave it to me and I bought some gas and a lot of groceries. I even bought a can of pears because the kid was always crying for fruit and hadn't had any for a long time. And out we went to the place, following Mr. Fentrup in the fine new Buick.

The place wasn't a real farm, the way we knew farms, but still a nice place with a little brook and a lot of forage for stock between the big stumps left when the land was logged over. The house was good too — a good-sized room with two metal beds and a cook-stove and a table made out of a box, and another little room with a cot and boards made into shelves for stowing stuff away on. The well was fifty or sixty feet away from the house, a good deep one.

'Get yourselves settled,' Mr. Fentrup said. 'I'll be around first thing to-morrow to tell you what I want done. I hope you'll be here. I'm speculating twenty bucks you will.'

'We'll be here, Mister,' I said.

'That's right,' the old man said. 'We'll be here. And I thank you very much.'

The old woman didn't speak because she wasn't there. She was inside the house with the kid, looking it over and pleased as punch.

The old man was all for taking a walk around and looking into the barn, which seemed in bad shape from here. But the old woman came out and asked us to unload the heap, so we went after

that. We had her loaded to the guards everywhere, and a lot of stuff was tied on the sides and behind with baling wire. We put away the stuff we didn't want right now, like the fireless cooker and the bird cage and the phonograph with the broken spring and the portrait of my grandfather with the broken glass. We hung up the clothes and brought the mattresses and blankets in and made up the beds. Then we brought in the groceries and started dinner.

The old woman said hardly a word. But I noticed her open a trunk and get out a tablecloth and some real cloth napkins and the silver pepper and salt things she'd got for a wedding present. That showed how good she was feeling.

For dinner we had canned corn and fresh peas and round steak and milk and coffee and lettuce with real dressing and the can of pears and doughnuts. It was a real meal. I got out a cigar for the old man and cigarettes for myself and he grinned all over. He said something weak about being wasteful but I told him to can it, this was a celebration. You got to be a little bit wasteful to have a real celebration.

I remember a funny thing. I was thinking it seemed awfully quiet, and then I realized it was because the kid wasn't crying.

It was great to wake up in the morning, as the old song says, feeling like a brace of wildcats in the mating season, full of the fire and raring to go. When you sleep in the heap, or on a blanket alongside the road, you always wake up more tired than when you went to sleep.

The old woman made a fine big breakfast and I had to laugh when we were through and I looked at the kid. His stomach stuck out like he was pregnant, he'd stowed away so much food.

Soon after that it began to rain, a warm hard rain and I was glad of it because it gave me a chance to see how the roof was. After a half hour I saw a few leaks and got some old roofing paper I'd seen in the barn and went up on the roof and fixed it. Just as I finished and was ready to come down the big Buick drove in and Mr. Fentrup got out and walked over to us.

'Well,' he said, 'I see you're still here.'

'You bet we're here,' I said.

'Well,' Mr. Fentrup said, looking at me with a funny smile, 'I really figured you'd be. Everything all right?'

'Just fine,' the old man said. 'Couldn't ask for a thing.'

'That's the spirit,' Mr. Fentrup said. 'I'm glad to see you aren't like these relief bums that got to have gold-plated shovels to lean on.'

Nobody said anything and Mr. Fentrup lighted a fresh cigar. He looked slowly around the place and puffed smoke in the air. When the old woman came out he nodded and touched his big hatbrim with a finger.

We went over to the barn with him and he showed us what he wanted done — the roof was all shot and a lot of the timbers had to be replaced. He had a load of material coming out to-day, he said, and he'd send over enough tools. 'Then he went down to the meadow bottom and showed us the stakes we were to follow in building the fence. He had wire coming out too, and a posthole digger, and we'd find plenty of wood around the place for posts, he said. But he wanted the barn fixed first. He had decided to send a few cows over from another place, where the grazing was running short, and there had to be a fit place for them.

'You know how to milk cows and care for them?'

I said, 'I was born milking a cow and the old man was too. And the old woman's as good a milker for a female as you'll meet up with anywhere.'

'Fine,' he said. 'When they come I'll send cans too. The co-op truck will pick up the milk every other day. Of course, you can have what you want for your own needs. Don't be afraid to drink all you want.'

'That's mighty good of you,' the old man said, and Mr. Fentrup smiled and puffed on his cigar and said to forget it.

When he drove off in the Buick he waved to him. The old man would have waved until he was out of sight but I stopped him. It would look funny, I said. The thing to do now was get right in and keep busy pulling bad timbers out of the barn until the tools and materials came.

The old woman came out and said I'd have to cut some wood, she had a big washing to do, and I got her three or four armloads. It was a lot of fun to chop the wood and every time I brought the axe down to think, 'Now, you're my wood for my stove to heat my water, to wash my clothes, and to cook my food.' It made me feel like a lord of creation. When I went into the house the old woman was humming a tune. And she smiled so wide I could see where her back teeth had been pulled out.

The kid was running around outside playing cops and robbers all by himself, with that big full stomach sticking out where his shirt was torn. It was a great sight.

I got a couple of two-by-fours that were lying beside the house and went out toward the barn. The old man was sitting on a stump smoking his pipe and I had to call him twice to wake him up. 'This ain't the time for daydreaming,' I called to him. 'Do you want Mr. Fentrup to think we're a bunch of bums?'

The old man came scurrying over quick and went to the barn with me. The big foundation timbers weren't so bad, but everything else was in terrible shape. We tore right into it, using the two-by-fours for crowbars, and we had a tremendous pile of the rotten stuff out to one side by the time the truck came with the material and the tools.

I got a big kick out of that. The driver and his helper unloaded and then he came over to me with a piece of paper and said, 'Sign here, Mister.' It was the first time anyone ever called me Mister. I read the piece of paper and then checked around to see that everything had been delivered. And then I signed.

'You rebuilding this barn?' the driver said.

'Yes.'

'You must be doing it cheap. Fentrup shopped around town to get a price on the job and the best offer he got was three hundred and fifty. He said it was robbery and he'd let it fall in first.'

'We'll beat the hell out of that,' I said.

The driver looked at me and grinned and drove off. I didn't like him. Then I forgot about him.

It was fine work, happy work. Twelve, thirteen hours a day

we put in and after that there was always a big meal and a good wash in the cold spring water and once or twice a drink of whisky, when I felt reckless. The old man was funny these days. He gave me all the money and I did what I wanted with it. He didn't seem to care about money at all any more.

Mr. Fentrup came out a few times and stood around watching us for a half hour or so. He was very nice and genial. All he ever said was, 'Well, you seem to be getting along. Don't kill yourselves, but finish up as fast as you can, boys'. He didn't drive you at all. And when he went away we worked harder than ever.

It was a great day when we got the barn finished. I drove in the last nail and came down from the roof and shook hands with the old man. It had taken us just sixteen days, counting the Sundays we'd worked. 'This,' I said, 'this calls for a party. Just like when we moved out here.' I went to the house and got the pint of whisky I'd bought and put away and told the old woman to come outside too. We all had a drink.

'To-night,' I said, 'we're going in town and see the movie. This is Friday night and they have a movie every Friday and Saturday. I got just enough money left. I'll draw some more from Mr. Fentrup when he comes out to-morrow.'

The old man said, 'I don't think you'd better spend the money like that. It'd be a lot of fun, of course, but we ought to be careful. We ought to save what we can.'

'Sure,' the old woman said. 'Movies ain't for us.' But I could see the light shining in her eyes that meant she wanted to go worse than anything. It must have been years since she'd seen a movie.

I said, 'We're going and that's an end to that.'

We felt high as hell and plenty good. The old man and I just stood off and looked at the barn and saw what we'd accomplished. We'd saved Mr. Fentrup money and I knew he'd appreciate it.

So after dinner we went in to the movies. It was a good show with music and dancing and a newsreel with the U.S. Fleet in manœuvres. The kid had been to another movie once but he'd never seen anything like those big guns belching smoke and

thunder at him and he yelled like an Indian. We had quite a time quieting him down but he had a good time anyway.

We went out talking about what a good show it was, and a funny thing happened. A guy with a mean face said to the woman with him, 'There's them bums Fentrup put on his farm, after practically telling your nephew he could have it. No telling what kind of trash seeming respectable people will cotton to, is there?' He said it loud so we could hear it, and I knew he meant us to hear it. The old man looked around with his mouth open and the old woman blushed red all over her face and neck. I did it really before I knew it. I just moved. I went over to this fellow and pushed him against the wall with one hand and said, 'What did you say, Mister?' in a quiet voice. I pushed him hard in the belly with one hand and he made a little grunting noise and then I began to laugh. I wasn't mad any more. Because he looked so damn scared and here we were all fixed up and it didn't mean a thing to us. We were sitting on top of the world and nothing anybody said, unless it was Mr. Fentrup, made any difference to us.

So I pushed this guy in the belly again, not very hard, and he made that silly noise again and I let him go.

'You shouldn'ta done that,' the old man said. 'You'll get us in trouble. Don't you just pay attention to people and you'll do better.'

'That's right,' the old woman said, and I saw she was wiping tears off her face with her handkerchief. It was her good one, the one she'd got for a present a couple of years back and almost never used.

I put my arm around her and gave the old man a dig in the ribs. 'Forget it,' I said. 'We got a right to stand up for ourselves. I shoulda pushed that bastard's teeth right down where his guts is, if he has any, but I just feel too good for that. He won't make any trouble. He's scared.'

Mr. Fentrup was pleased with the barn all right. He didn't say much when he came around the next day, but you could tell he liked what we'd done. When I told him we'd like to have another twenty dollars on account he shelled it right out without saying a word, though he had me sign a receipt in a little black notebook.

He made a couple of suggestions and we said we'd attend to them right away. Then he said he'd send the cows over in a day or two, maybe to-morrow if he could, and he guessed we'd be able to get around to the fence now.

'Sure,' I said. 'We'll have that fence done afore you know. We're intending to pitch in to-morrow morning. The old woman can take care of the cows mostly. She's a good hand at milking. Then they won't take much of our time away from the fencing.'

'That's good,' Mr. Fentrup said. 'That's fine. You're doing great.' It made you feel good to stand there and hear him say that. When he drove away, he slowed down at the turn and waved back at us. He'd never done that before.

'Well,' I said to the old man, 'we're pleasing him.'

'Well,' the old man said slowly, 'we're putting out a lot of work.'

'You ain't afraid of work, are you? You don't need a rest cure yet, do you? You want to do a good turn for a good turn, don't you?'

The old man looked at me and blinked his eyes. He looked pretty old and weak just then. He didn't look as if he had the old get-up-and-go like he used to have. It worried me for a minute, but I got over it. He was just getting older and it was one of those things.

'Sure I do,' the old man said. 'Don't get me wrong, son.'

I clapped him on the back. 'That's the talk,' I said. Age or no age, the old man's got the stuff. If it's in a man he never entirely loses it.

Mr. Fentrup sent eight cows over the next afternoon — nice big Holsteins that had been cared for right. I made up my mind then and there that they'd get the same kind of treatment now. We weren't going to let his cows run down on him, not if I had to work midnights cleaning them up and currying them down. He was a particular man, Mr. Fentrup, which was the way he ought to be, and he'd prospered because of it.

So the old woman did most of the morning and evening milkings and wasn't a night any of those cows were put in the stalls without a thorough washing and brushing down. I pride myself all of them looked like show stock every morning when we turned them out.

They were a nuisance for a time, us having no fences and having to chase them over half a county on foot to round them up at milking time. Cows don't move fast but it's amazing the miles they can cover in a day. But by stepping on the throttle the old man and I got thirty acres fenced in a hurry and then we could keep them in.

We'd been there four months and were through with the fencing and considerable clearing, when I said to the old man one day, 'What's worrying me is, we're about done and I'm wondering what else is coming up. Not just little stuff, I mean, but something important.'

'I wouldn't think about it,' the old man said. 'I guess Mr. Fentrup's got something in mind.'

And sure enough a week later Mr. Fentrup came out and walked around the new fence with us. It was fine, he said, a real good job. He was glad to congratulate us. It was a funny thing, he said, but when he took us on he had a sort of a hunch we really were just bums and after he'd told us we could have the place he'd called himself a damn fool. Anyway, he said, he was happy he'd been mistaken and he guessed in a way he owed us an apology.

I had to laugh. 'My god,' I said. 'Imagine you owing us an apology, Mr. Fentrup.' He laughed too and the old man joined in.

Going back to his car he told us we might do something to the house now, like adding a room and putting on a new roof and painting. I was glad to hear him say it. It would sure go over big with the old woman.

'I'll send the stuff out. Just use your own ideas and go ahead.'

Then he got in his car and said, 'Just a minute.' He fished around under a blanket and brought out a nearly full bottle of good whisky. 'Maybe you could use this,' he said.

'You bet!' I said, because the old man didn't say anything. 'Maybe you'd have a snort with us.' So we all had a drink as chummy as you please and Mr. Fentrup left.

The old woman came as near dancing as she ever does — which is a lively look in her left eye, the good one — when we said he'd told us to work on the house.

'The best thing that ever happened to us,' I said, 'is running the heap out of gas in Clarendon. It all goes to prove you never know when your luck turns.'

'I guess that's right,' the old man said.

We did one fine job on that house. We added a new room and went over everything from stem to stern. If you'd seen it before and afterward, you wouldn't believe it was the same place. Then when we were about finished a big truck came out with Mr. Fentrup riding with the driver. He got out of the cab grinning and walked over to us.

'I've got a little surprise for you,' he said. 'Come and take a look.' We went around and looked in the truck and there was a bathtub and toilet and wash bowl and a laundry tray. 'Sort of makes things nice for you,' he said.

I ran in and brought the old woman out and when she saw the stuff she almost cried. She looked as if she didn't believe her own eyes. Then she looked at Mr. Fentrup and while she didn't say anything there were more honest thank-yous in that look than you could ever put down in words. And after that she went back to the house walking on air, like a young girl almost.

We went right to work putting in the plumbing. It took us a little longer than I expected, because there is a lot about that business I don't know for sure and the old man is better with a saw than with a pipe wrench. We wound it up in a week, and Mr. Fentrup sent out a little electric generator to pump the water in. I remember when I drew the first water. We almost made a party of it. The old woman had the first bath, heating big pails of water on the stove because we hadn't quite finished with the hot water coils, and you'da thought she had her own hundred-thousand-buck swimming tank, like the ones they build in Hollywood.

So there we were all fixed and right on top of the world. I guess no family had a happier time than we did for the next month. There wasn't much to do — just taking care of the cows and odd jobs and cutting wood and keeping an eye on things. And I built a little bridge across the creek — it didn't amount to much, just

a suggestion Mr. Fentrup made one day. He was real nice about suggesting things. He didn't give orders. He'd just say, 'By the way, if you run out of things for amusement, don't you think it might be a good idea to do so-and-so?'

Then one day the old man and I were down doing a little work on the road where it runs into the highway, and Mr. Fentrup drove up in his car. He had the newest model now, a honey. He saw us and stopped. Right away I saw he was sort of uneasy. He passed the time of day and all but he didn't smile. He asked how things were and we said fine, just fine, and he said that was good and for a long time he was quiet.

Finally he came out with it. 'Boys, I hate to say it, but I got some bad news for you.'

Nobody said anything. 'Boys,' he said, 'things has been getting tough. And the way it is now I just can't see my way clear to keeping you folks on. I want you to know I got no kick at all; I couldn't ask for better people. There's nothing personal in it at all, I want you to know, and I feel as bad about it as you do. Only that's the way it is. About all I can do is put a kid I got in mind out here who'll live on next to nothing. And—' He stopped.

I looked at the old man and the old man looked at me. Then the old man looked at Mr. Fentrup. 'Mr. Fentrup,' the old man said, 'maybe we could get along on less. We sure like it here and —'

Mr. Fentrup shook his head in a slow, sad way and the old man shut up. 'It's just that the way things are I couldn't keep on paying enough to keep a big family alive. And don't get the idea I'm hurrying you. Take all the time you need. If there's anything I can do in the way of references and that sort of thing, just call on me and I'm at your service. And I'm not the man to have you go off short. You got your fifty bucks coming this month. Well, I'm going to just make it a hundred.'

He pulled out his wallet, counted out a hundred dollars in tens and held it out to the old man. The old man didn't move a muscle. I guess maybe he didn't see it. So I took it and said thanks.

I said, 'I appreciate what you done for us and I'm sorry things is that tough with you.' And he said he was sorry too and shook hands with me and drove off. He would have shaken hands with the old man I'm sure, but the old man wasn't paying attention to anything. He was just standing looking off to the hills, as if he admired the view.

The bad part was breaking the news to the old woman. I thought she'd cry her eyes out, and you couldn't reason with her. I kept telling her how we had the extra fifty bucks and how fine it'd been and we were all in better shape and would get another break soon and you couldn't blame Mr. Fentrup or anybody, it was just the way things were. But she wouldn't listen. I really think she blamed Mr. Fentrup, and I think for a while the old man did too.

We left in a couple of days. Just before we started the old man and the old woman stood by the heap and looked all around, at the house and the barn and the fence and the pasture and everything. I didn't feel so good either. But I called out, 'There's a better spot ahead, pile in, you people.' And away we went. The heap was running pretty good now. I overhauled her in odd moments.

Just a few minutes ago the old man and I were talking about the fine place we had last year. I think he's feeling better now. He's got the idea, more or less. Every so often you're going to get a break like that and maybe it's just ahead a few miles. You never know. That's the best part of it, not knowing. It makes you keep the old chin up, at least most of the time.

It's a fine thing to remember that and how we got on and the good times we had there. When things look toughest I remember back and everything improves right away. Of course the old woman's hard to convince and so is the old man sometimes, and the kid's too young for reason. But it's good to think of when you're nursing the heap along and wondering whether that grinding noise means the differential is about to let go. The next break may come any time, the next minute or the next hour or to-morrow. It's ahead there, somewhere, sometime.

Your General Does Not Sleep

BY EMILIO LUSSU

(From *The Atlantic Monthly*)

I

OUR new Divisional Commander, Lieutenant-General Leone was introduced to us in dispatches by our Army Corps Commander as 'a soldier of proved courage and determination.'

I came across him for the first time at Mount Spill, near battalion headquarters.

Standing at attention, I gave him the latest information concerning our battalion.

'At ease,' said the General curtly. 'Where have you been fighting up to now?'

'With my brigade, on the Carso, sir.'

'Have you been wounded?'

'No, sir.'

'What! You've been at the front since the beginning of the war and have never been wounded? Not even once?'

'No, sir, except for a few slight wounds that did not necessitate leaving the battalion.'

'But I mean serious wounds.'

'I haven't had any, sir.'

'Were you present at all the fighting in which your brigade has taken part?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Most extraordinary. Are you by any chance lacking in courage?'

I said to myself, 'No one except an army corps commander can effectively deal with a man like this.'

Since I did not answer at once, the General repeated his question.

'I think not,' I replied.

'Do you merely think not, or are you sure?'

'In war one can be sure of nothing, sir,' I answered gently, and in the hope of propitiating him I added with the merest suggestion of a smile: 'Not even of being sure.'

The General did not smile. I do not think he was capable of smiling. His steel helmet, with the chin strap fixed, gave him a metallic look. His mouth was invisible, and but for his moustache one might almost have thought he had none. His eyes were grey and hard.

He changed the subject.

'Do you like war?'

I hesitated. Ought I to answer the question? There were officers and men standing round us, listening to what was being said. I decided to answer as best I could.

'I was in favour of Italy's participation in the war, sir, and at my university I was the leader of the interventionist group.'

'That,' said the General with terrible calm, 'concerns the past. I'm asking you about the present.'

'War is a serious matter . . . and it would be hard to say whether . . .' He was staring at me with evident dissatisfaction. I went on: 'At all events, I do my duty. In every way.'

'I did not ask you,' the General retorted, 'whether you did your duty or not. In war, everyone does his duty, because if he doesn't he risks being shot. I asked you whether you liked war.'

'Whether I like war?' I repeated despondently.

The General, inexorable, continued to glare at me. The pupils of his eyes seemed to have grown. They gave me the impression that they were revolving in their sockets.

'You can't answer?' he insisted.

'Well, it seems to me . . . I can say, at any rate, that I —' I floundered in desperate search of a possible answer.

'Well?'

'That personally -- that is, speaking for myself, in a general way -- I can't really profess to have any particular *liking* for war.'

'Attention!' snapped the General.

I was already standing at attention.

'Then you are in favour of peace?' His voice bristled with surprise and contempt.

'So, you are for peace,' he continued, 'like a silly woman who sees nothing beyond her home and all its comforts! Is that it?'

'No, sir.'

'Well, then, what kind of peace do you want?'

'A peace . . .' A sudden inspiration came to my rescue. 'A victorious peace.'

The General seemed reassured and asked me to accompany him to the front line.

I I

Our trench was solidly built of stones and earth. The men could walk along it upright without being seen by the enemy. Our snipers kept a good lookout, firing through loopholes, from under cover.

The General peered through the loopholes, but this did not satisfy him. He had stones heaped in such a way that he could stand on them and look over the parapet through his field glasses. His head and shoulders were thus fully exposed.

'Sir,' I said, 'the Austrians are remarkably good shots. It's dangerous to expose yourself in this way.'

The General took no notice, but continued looking through his glasses. Two reports rang out from the enemy's lines and the bullets whistled past him. Two more followed, still nearer. Only then did he get down, calm and unhurried. I looked at him closely. He had an air of arrogant indifference.

One of our sentries, a few paces off, was looking through his loophole and paying no attention to us. But a few men and a corporal of the 12th Company had gathered about us in a small group and were watching the General with more distrust than admiration. In the reckless demeanour of their divisional commander they evidently found some cause for apprehension concerning their own fate. He looked at them with satisfaction.

'If you are not afraid,' he said to the corporal, 'do what your General has just done.'

'Yes, sir,' replied the corporal, and, leaning his rifle against the side of the trench, he climbed on to the mound.

Instinctively I seized him by the arm and pulled him down.

'The Austrians are on the lookout now, sir,' I said; 'they won't miss again.'

The General, with a furious look, reminded me of the vast difference in rank between himself and me. I let go of the corporal's arm and said no more.

'It's all right, sir,' said the corporal, and climbed up again.

Hardly had his head appeared above the parapet when a volley rang out. The Austrians were evidently waiting with their rifles covering the spot. The corporal was not touched. He remained there leaning against the parapet, his whole chest exposed.

'Bravo!' said the General. 'Now you can get down.'

From the enemy trenches a single shot rang out. The corporal toppled backwards on to us. I bent over him. A bullet had gone clean through his chest, below the collarbone, and blood was trickling from his mouth. With half-closed eyes, scarcely able to breathe, he murmured to me: 'It's nothing, sir.'

The men gazed at the General with hatred in their eyes.

'He's a hero — a true hero,' said the General, taking a silver lira piece from his pocket. 'Here,' he said, 'drink a glass of wine when you get the chance.'

The wounded man made a gesture of refusal with his head and hid his hands. The General stood with the coin between his fingers and, after a moment's hesitation, let it drop on to the corporal's body. No one picked it up.

Continuing his tour of inspection of the front line, the General reached the end of the section occupied by our battalion and dispensed with my services.

I went back to battalion headquarters. The front line was seething with indignation. The news of what had happened had spread throughout the sector, largely owing to the stretcher bearers, who, in carrying the corporal to the dressing station, had told everyone they met about the incident.

III

It was hardly to be expected that an officer as intrepid as General Leone would remain inactive for long. He wanted at all costs to capture Monte Fior. Every day he was up in the front line, calculating distances, scribbling on maps, making plans. Finally he worked out a scheme consisting of a surprise attack in full daylight, with bayonets, to be carried out by my battalion, which was considered the one most familiar with the terrain in question.

The attack was fixed for the twenty-sixth. However, on the twenty-fourth, the Austrians fell back, abandoning Monte Fior to us in much the same way that we had abandoned it to them. Their retirement, which must have taken some days to carry out, had been cleverly concealed from us. When we discovered it, we promptly advanced, and had only a few encounters with scattered patrols that had been left in the front line.

The General was even bolder, when it came to a war of movement, than he had been in trench warfare. He gave orders that our troops were never, by day or night, to lose contact with the enemy, and insisted on our brigade commander's remaining in person with our vanguard. Our brigadier, in spite of his advanced age, put himself at the head of the 1st Company and was killed in a skirmish with enemy patrols. It was a great grief to the entire brigade, for the men were much attached to him.

When General Leone heard of his death his determination was redoubled.

'He must be avenged!' he announced. 'Avenged at once!'

His thirst for revenge was somewhat slaked by the tactics of the enemy. Their machine-gun detachments were fighting with dogged persistence, ready to sacrifice their own lives if by so doing they could check our advance. The General cast off his habitual calm. Climbing a tree, he took up his position at the top of it, like the captain of a ship at the masthead.

'Forward, men!' he shouted. 'You must avenge your brigadier!'

'If we were to avenge our brigadier in good earnest,' growled

Captain Canevacci to me, 'we'd have two generals dead to-day. Our revenge would leave the post of divisional commander vacant once more.'

Toward evening, enemy resistance weakened. The General had come down from his tree and was marching on foot between the 2nd Battalion and ours, followed by an orderly leading his mule. From in front of us a voice suddenly cried:

'Halt! Ground your packs!'

'Who was that?' asked the General in a burst of anger.

It was a private of the 7th Company of the 2nd Battalion, on liaison duty, who, having come to a point where the path forked, had warned the men behind him to stop, so that the scouts might have time to find out which was the right track to follow. One of them had been killed only a moment before, and it was clearly unwise to continue the advance without reconnoitring the terrain. He was only obeying orders, as Captain Zavattari, of the 6th, pointed out to the General.

'Have that man shot,' ordered the General.

Captain Zavattari was an officer of the reserve and the senior captain of our regiment. In civil life he was head of a bureau in the Ministry of Education. It seemed inconceivable to him that he could have one of his men shot. He explained this carefully to the General.

'Have him shot at once!' replied the General without a moment's hesitation.

Captain Zavattari went away, and, having questioned the scout, returned to the General, who immediately demanded, 'Have you had him shot?'

'No, sir. He was merely carrying out his orders. In calling out "Ground your packs", it never occurred to him that he might be exhibiting slackness or indiscipline. One of the scouts had just been killed, and a halt was necessary to reconnoitre the terrain.'

'Have him shot all the same,' replied the General in an icy tone. 'An example must be made.'

'How can I have a man shot when he's committed no crime?'

The General did not have Captain Zavattari's juridical turn of mind, and he flew into a rage.

'Give orders at once for a firing squad,' he shouted, 'and don't force me to have you shot too, by my own carabinieri.'

Captain Zavattari realized that there was nothing to be done unless he could find some expedient for saving the scout's life.

'Very well, sir,' he replied.

'Carry out the order and report to me at once.'

Captain Zavattari went forward again to his company, which had halted to await orders. He ordered a firing squad to fire a volley at a tree trunk and made the stretcher bearers place the body of the scout who had just been killed on a stretcher. He then returned to the General, followed by the stretcher bearers and their burden. The men, who knew nothing of the reason for so macabre a stratagem, stared dumbfounded at one another.

'The man has been shot,' said Captain Zavattari.

Seeing the stretcher, the General stood at attention and saluted it proudly. He appeared deeply moved.

'Let us salute our country's martyrs! In war, discipline is a grievous necessity. Let us honour our dead!'

I V

A violent hailstorm had reduced the temperature to freezing point, and we were all drenched to the skin. We had a blanket each and a sailcloth cover, but we were still wearing our summer kit. The cold was unbearable. At midnight we were allowed to light fires, as the enemy was some way off and the wood hid us from sight.

We were sitting round the fires. The fir branches burned with a resinous smell. The men were discussing in whispers the events of the day. Suddenly a stentorian cry resounded through the wood.

'Keep a good lookout! Don't sleep! The enemy is not far off! Who could it be?

'Keep a lookout! Anyone who falls asleep is a dead man. Your General does not sleep. Be on your guard!'

It was General Leone.

The cavernous voice shattered the silence of the night. I had just left my place near one of the fires, where I had been sitting beside our battalion commander, and was standing near the men of the 12th Company, who were crouching in groups about the blazing branches. They were quite unaware of my presence.

'Keep a lookout! Your General is here. Don't sleep!'

The voice was coming nearer and nearer. The General was walking through our battalion.

'The madman is awake,' whispered a private of the 12th.

'Generals are better dead than awake,' commented another.

'Is no one going to have a shot at that butcher?' whispered the first speaker.

'I'm going to. I'm going to have a shot at him.'

The speaker was an oldish man who until now had said nothing and who seemed exclusively intent on warming himself. He was sitting next to the sergeant.

The men were huddled so closely round the fire that the flames lit their faces, and I could recognize each one. The sergeant was kneeling motionless, his hands held out to the flames. He said nothing.

'If he shows himself, I'll shoot him,' repeated the same man. And I saw him take up his rifle and load it.

'Keep a lookout! Be on your guard!' thundered the General.

He suddenly became visible, between two of the fires, about fifty paces away. He was wearing his trench helmet and a long grey cloak. A thick scarf was wrapped round his neck and shoulders. He walked with measured step, shouting with both hands to his mouth. In the flickering light he looked like a phantom.

'Keep awake!'

'Curious, isn't it?' I said suddenly. 'The General doesn't seem to need any sleep.'

The soldier lowered his rifle. The sergeant sprang to his feet and offered me his place by the fire.

v

General Leone was directing all the preparations for the forthcoming attack in person. From early morning onwards he was always to be found in the front line, accompanied by the regimental commander. The General liked to see to everything himself. His tenacity of purpose was even greater than his daring. This time he was determined to break through.

Rumours had spread during the night that a number of batteries of different calibre were to take part in the operations. So the accursed trenches and barbed-wire entanglements were going to be blown up for us at last by the artillery!

The field guns could not be said to be arriving *en masse*. However, General Leone was determined to produce one, at least, for our benefit. He had a 75 gun dragged up to the front by way of mule tracks and mountain paths. Where its companions were, none of us ever discovered. Probably they too had been sent, like ambassadors extraordinary, to the various brigades scattered over the plateau. They must have remained silent, however, for we never heard their voices.

Artillerymen and infantry made a wide breach in our trench and ran the gun into it so that the wheels were outside and the carriage inside the trench. As soon as the Austrians saw it, they opened fire. The gun, with its armoured shield, was not damaged by rifle fire, and the General ordered the lieutenant in command of the artillery to start firing.

The General, the Colonel, Captain Bravini, and I were standing near, under cover of the trench. After the first few rounds General Leone, his usual grim expression unchanged, began to rub his hands with satisfaction, looking round at the men as though to say: 'See what your General has brought you!' The men seemed indifferent, obviously unable to appreciate the importance of the gift.

As soon as the gun got into action, enemy machine-gun and rifle fire slackened and then stopped altogether, except for a single expert sniper who was posted directly opposite. Aiming

with ever-increasing skill and precision, he tried to pick off the gun layer by firing through the sighting aperture in the shield. The artilleryman increased the rate of fire, and the noise of the gun, together with that of its shells bursting on the enemy's trench, drowned the small, persistent crack of the rifle. The General was still rubbing his hands together.

'Well done!' he said to the artillery lieutenant. 'Well done!'

From Val d'Assa, not less than five miles away, a battery of 155's began to fire on us. In a few moments a veritable hail of shells was falling round the gun. The gunners took no notice, but stuck to their post. Some of the shells fell in front of our trenches and others on those of the enemy. Our gun had found a useful auxiliary. The General's enthusiasm increased.

'Bravo!' he said again to the artillery lieutenant. 'I'll get you a promotion for service in the field.'

The sniper's aim was becoming more and more accurate. He was firing methodically. A shot finally penetrated the aperture and smashed the gun layer's arm. Without a word, he showed it to the officer, who took his place at the gun. The sniper went on as before.

The battery of 155's ceased fire, apparently satisfied. Our gun continued firing, but its shells were falling now on the enemy's barbed wire, now on their trenches, without the slightest effect. It was clear that it could have gone on all day with the same result.

The Colonel, who up to now had been standing silently at the General's side, exclaimed, half to himself. 'All this is perfectly useless.'

The General did not appear annoyed. He turned to the Colonel and said, 'Do you really think so?'

'No use at all,' replied the Colonel, positively; 'absolutely none, sir.'

I looked at the Colonel in astonishment. It was the first time he had ever dared to disagree with an officer higher in rank than himself.

The General reflected for a moment. He stroked his chin and

appeared to be deep in thought. He too could not fail to see that the little 75 was utterly impotent against such solid trenches and extensive barbed-wire entanglements. While he was considering the matter, the artillery lieutenant was also hit in the arm. A sergeant promptly replaced him.

As the lieutenant passed us, bandaging his arm, the General suddenly seemed to make up his mind. Clapping him on the shoulder, he ordered him to cease fire. Then, turning to the Colonel, he said, 'Now we'll try the Farina cuirasses.'

V I

Eighteen Farina cuirasses were thereupon brought into the trench. It was the first time I had seen them. They were of thick armour plating, made in two or three pieces, to cover the neck and shoulders and to protect the body almost as far as the knees. Each one could not have been less than a hundred pounds in weight. A helmet, also extremely heavy, went with each cuirass.

The General stood looking at them. With a scientific air he began:

'These are the famous Farina cuirasses, which very few people know about. They admit of the most daring exploits in broad daylight. It's a pity there are so few of them — only eighteen in the whole army corps. But all those eighteen are ours!'

A group of men, standing a few yards away in the trench, heard him, and one of them remarked: 'I'd rather have a flask of decent brandy myself.'

'To us alone,' continued the General, 'has the privilege been given of possessing these cuirasses. The enemy have rifles, machine guns, and artillery; but with a Farina cuirass one can get through anywhere.'

'Anywhere — that is, relatively speaking,' commented the Colonel, who seemed in a heroic mood that day.

The General took no notice and looked at the Colonel as though he had raised a purely technical objection. The Colonel was slow and passive by temperament, but once in a while he would allow

himself to overstep the bounds imposed on others. He had the stature of a giant and a large family fortune, two qualities not without their effect.

'I have already come across Farina cuirasses,' he went on, 'and they didn't make a very good impression on me. But perhaps these are better.'

'Certainly they're better,' replied the General. 'With these one can go anywhere. The Austrian —'

He lowered his voice and glanced suspiciously at the enemy trenches, to make sure he could not be overheard.

'The Austrians have spent enormous sums,' he continued, 'have spent enormous sums in trying to steal from us the secret of how to make them. But they haven't succeeded. Colonel, will you be so kind as to order out the work squad?'

The squad consisted entirely of volunteers, including the sergeant. They put on the cuirasses, the General himself giving a hand in tightening a buckle here and there. Each man had a pair of wire cutters.

'They look like medieval warriors,' he remarked.

We were silent, and the volunteers did not smile. They got ready hurriedly, with a determined air. The other soldiers watched them anxiously. What, after all, could these men do, even if they succeeded in getting through the barbed wire and reaching the enemy line?

We made another breach in the wall of the trench. The sergeant saluted the General, who responded gravely, standing at attention, and then led his men out of the trench. They followed slowly owing to the weight of the steel, bent over in two in order to protect their faces, for the helmets covered only their heads, temples, and the napes of their necks.

The General remained standing at attention until the last of them had left the trench. He then turned and said gravely to the Colonel, 'The Romans owed their victories to their cuirasses.'

An Austrian machine gun started to enfilade them from the right. Another immediately opened fire from the left. I looked at the men around me in the trench. Their faces were contracted

with grief. They knew well what was happening. The Austrians were waiting at the gaps in the wire, and the sappers were under a cross fire from two machine guns.

'Forward!' shouted the sergeant to his men.

One after the other they fell, every one of them. Not a single man even got so far as the enemy's wire.

'Forward . . .' the sergeant repeated, over and over again, as he lay wounded in front of the barbed wire.

The General was silent. The men in the trench looked at one another aghast. What was going to happen to them now?

The Colonel went up to the General and said, 'Have we got to attack at nine, all the same?'

'Certainly,' replied the General, just as though he had foreseen that things would turn out precisely as they did. 'My division will attack along the whole of its front line at nine sharp.'

Captain Bravini took me by the arm and said, 'Our turn now!'

He removed the stopper from his flask and drank the whole of its contents.

At the end of that day there were no more than two hundred men left in my battalion, and we were reduced to three officers.

When we had finished bringing in the dead and wounded, which the Austrians allowed us to do without firing a shot from their trenches, I lay down and tried to sleep. My head seemed light as air, almost as though I were breathing with my brain. I was exhausted, yet I could not sleep.

VII

It was a bright sunny day. The entire front was quiet, except that, borne by the wind, the sound of an occasional shot reached us from the Val d'Assa. A cheerful voice suddenly broke in upon our silence.

'Good morning!'

It was a young cavalry lieutenant. We shook hands and introduced ourselves to each other. It appeared that he belonged to the Royal Piedmont Regiment, and was attached to Army

Headquarters. This was the first time he had come up to the line he had never before seen a trench. He was not on duty, but had come of his own initiative to have a look at the front line and see for himself how we lived there. He was impeccably dressed, with white gloves, crop, cavalry boots, and spurs, and was accompanied by an orderly.

'You'd better look out,' I warned him at once, 'for in that bright new uniform of yours you'll be a target for all the expert snipers in the enemy lines.'

He joked about these snipers. Even his accent amused me. He spoke gracefully, with a good deal of affectation, pronouncing his r's more or less in the French manner.

My appearance was so disreputable that I almost felt as if I were in the presence of someone of higher rank. Little by little, however, I managed to overcome the feeling of inferiority that a man who is filthy feels in the presence of one who is clean. In a very few minutes we were on excellent terms.

I led the way and we went into the front-line trench. He had no fear and was determined to show us that he had none, which is always very dangerous in the line. I kept on saying to him, 'Do as I do,' 'Bend down here,' 'Touch the ground with your hands, here,' 'Stop here'; but he did not bend down, touch the ground, or stop. He wanted to look at everything, through the loopholes and over the parapet. I made endless efforts to persuade him to be more prudent.

We stopped in a traverse, to take advantage of the shade. He said to me, 'I think you infantrymen are too cautious. Caution never won a war.'

It was a peculiarly unfortunate remark, an affront both to me and to my *esprit de corps*.

'That is because we have only our legs to count on,' I retorted. 'In a ticklish moment, if an infantryman finds his knees shaking, he can't move a step forward. You are more fortunate. You may be dying of fear, but the legs of your horses will carry you all the same.'

Only later did I repent of having spoken like this; for the

moment I was satisfied with my answer, thinking that the cavalryman had been put in his place. He made no reply.

We had now reached loophole No. 14.

'This,' I explained to him, 'is the best loophole in our sector, but it can be used only at night, when the Austrians are sending up rockets. During the day it's forbidden to look through it. The enemy have got it covered with a fixed rifle and there's always someone there to fire it. Several of our officers and men have been killed or wounded in that way. The men amuse themselves by holding up bits of wood or paper, or coins attached to a small stick, and the bullets never miss the loophole and always strike the target.'

We both examined the aperture. It was no longer merely a hole made in the wall of the trench and closed with a stone. The men had fixed up an armoured loophole which had been found in the ruins of Asiago. It was a heavy steel plate, with an opening for observation which could be closed with a shutter, also made of steel. Keeping under cover, I raised the shutter, and waited for the bullet. But the enemy did not fire.

'The sentry's asleep,' said the lieutenant.

I let the shutter fall back into its place and then opened it once more. The sun shone through the aperture as if through a lens. There was a whistling noise, accompanied by the sound of a shot. The bullet had passed through the opening.

My cavalry friend thought he would like to try this himself. He lifted the shutter and held the end of his crop in the opening. Another shot rang out and the crop was broken. He seized a piece of wood, fixed a coin to it, and repeated the experiment, saying that he would have something to talk about at Army Headquarters that night. The coin, struck in the centre, flew off the piece of wood, with a hissing sound. I went on up the trench to show him the next loophole.

'From this one,' I explained, 'you can see another section of the line, which is of less importance. There's no danger here. Over there you can see a heap that looks like a sack of coal. It's used to mask a machine-gun emplacement. We spotted it a few

nights ago, when it was firing after an alarm. We've already informed the regimental commander, so that if there is an attack it can be knocked out with a mountain gun.'

'So you've got some guns?'

'A few are beginning to reach us. Look over there, more to the left. What seems like a white spot is really a loophole commanding the other sector. And there, by that thick patch of fir trees, is a deep ravine. The line is not continuous after that, but begins again on the other side of the ravine.'

I thought he was behind me, looking at what I was pointing out. The loophole was a large one and there was room for two in front of it. Then I heard his voice, speaking from a little distance away.

'The knees of an officer of the Royal Piedmont Regiment,' he was saying, 'are steadier than those of his horse.'

A rifle shot followed his words. I turned to find my cavalry officer stretched on the ground by loophole No. 14. I hurried over to him, but he was already dead. A bullet had struck him in the forehead.

V I I I

Orders to make ready for fresh operations arrived at the same time as the news that the colours belonging to the two regiments of our brigade had been decorated with gold medals for valour. The Brigade Commander wished to celebrate the event and paraded all the officers at Brigade Headquarters. After the parade we walked back to the front line. In order to get back we had to pass the headquarters of the 1st Battalion.

We had just arrived there when a report came in that General Leone had been killed by an explosive bullet in the chest. It must be confessed that we were all jubilant at the news. Captain Zavattari invited us to stop at his headquarters, where he had some bottles of wine opened for us. Glass in hand, he addressed us as follows:

'Gentlemen, I think it may be permitted to a representative

of the Ministry of Public Education and a senior captain to raise his glass and drink good fortune to our Army. Emulating the fine tradition of certain virile peoples, amongst whom it is customary for the relatives to celebrate the death of a member of their family with feasting and dancing, we — not being in a position to do more — drink to the memory of our General. No occasion this for tears, gentlemen, but for joy — kept, of course, within suitable bounds. The hand of God has been seen upon the Asiago plateau, and, without complaining of the delay with which Providence manifests the Divine Will, we may perhaps agree that it was high time! He has left us. Peace be with him. Peace with him, and joy amongst us. And may we, now that he is dead, at last respect a general whom we detested while he was alive.'

We were all standing there with our glasses raised when, from amongst the fir trees, there appeared a mounted officer. I was facing the path and saw him first. He was coming straight toward us.

'I can't believe it!' I exclaimed.

Everyone looked round. It was General Leone. Mounted on a mule, his trench helmet pressed firmly over his eyes, an alpen-stock lashed to his saddle and field glasses hanging round his neck, he came trotting along, a sombre look on his face.

'Gentlemen, attention!' cried out Captain Zavattari. We stood at attention, without having had time to put down our glasses. Captain Zavattari, too, was standing stiffly, glass in hand.

'What happy event are you celebrating?' asked the Divisional Commander in a surly tone.

There was general embarrassment. Zavattari pulled himself together and replied in a voice that seemed to come from beyond the tomb:

'The gold medals which have been awarded to our colours.'

'Let me join in your toast,' said the General.

Zavattari offered him his own glass, which had not been touched. The General drained it at a gulp, gave it back, and then, putting spurs to his mule, trotted quickly away.

IX

During the quiet days that followed, rumours circulated in the brigade that we really were going to be sent down the line into rest billets at last. In any case we talked of nothing else among ourselves. General Leone came to hear of it and replied with a divisional order which ended thus: 'All officers and men must understand that until the war has been won the only rest permitted is in death.'

Although the fact had no repercussions on the history of the war, I must, for the better comprehension of what follows, put it on record that I was now promoted to command of a company. On the same day, as if to celebrate my promotion, the Austrians brought up a trench mortar and fired a few rounds at the trench that was held by my company.

From the evidence supplied by an unexploded shell we discovered that it had a calibre of 37 millimetres. Only a few shells were fired at a time, first at one loophole and then at another, and two of our sentries were wounded. In spite of all our efforts to spot its position, we failed to discover whether it was in the trench or some way behind it. Every day, at different times and without warning, this mortar fired on us.

The Divisional Commander heard it and asked for an explanation. The Brigade Commander passed on all the information he had, but General Leone was not satisfied and came up to the line to see for himself.

When he arrived, I was in the trench. My company was holding the left sector of the battalion front, extending to within a few paces of loophole No. 14, which was situated at the highest point. Farther to the right and immediately beyond it was Lieutenant Ottolenghi's machine-gun section, with its two guns, which was attached to us. He was responsible for the extreme right flank of the sector.

General Leone did not call at Battalion Headquarters, but came straight to the trenches. I saw him and went to meet him. He at once asked me about the trench mortar, and I told him all I knew.

When I had finished my report, he overwhelmed me with questions, so that I was again amazed at his interest in details and his wish for mathematical accuracy on the most insignificant points. He wanted to examine, one by one, about fifty loopholes, and he stayed in the sector held by my company for not less than an hour.

'Your loopholes,' he informed me at last, 'are sighted downward like the holes in the tower of the Palazzo della Signoria. They seem to have been made for catching grasshoppers instead of observing the enemy trenches.'

I took care not to smile, for he had spoken with his grimmest expression. Nevertheless, I explained to him why the loopholes in my sector had had to be made differently from those elsewhere, the reason being the lay of the terrain and the position of the trees and rocks on our front.

'It is not the fault of those who made them,' I said, 'but of the nature of the terrain. Look at this loophole, sir. If we were to move the field of fire farther to the left, we should come up against those fir trees and be able to see nothing. If we move it to the right, we are blocked by that rock. And we can't raise it, because those bushes would screen us.'

The General patiently examined everything. Every now and then he would look through his field glasses.

'You're right,' he said at last. 'The loopholes couldn't have been constructed just as we should have liked. But how am I going to find out the position of that accursed trench mortar? I want to silence it by artillery fire.'

The General had become reasonable and moderate. By the time we had arrived at the last loophole in my sector, he had even become polite.

'We first met at Mount Spill, I believe.'

'Yes, sir.'

'You're lucky. You've not been killed yet.'

'No, sir.'

To my great surprise, he took out his cigarette case and offered me a cigarette. But he didn't light his, so I could not very well light mine.

X

We had now entered the sector belonging to the machine-gun section and I was walking in front of him, leading the way. Lieutenant Ottolenghi, who had probably been warned, came toward us. I pointed him out to the General, explaining that he was the officer in charge of that sector, and stood back, leaving them face to face.

'Show me what loopholes you have,' said the General to Ottolenghi. 'I suppose you know them. Have you been in this sector long?'

'More than a week, sir. I have readjusted all the loopholes myself, so I'm familiar with all of them.'

Ottolenghi led the way, the General followed, and I brought up the rear; behind us were the two carabinieri whom the General brought with him when he came into the line and my orderly. All was quiet in the trench. During the whole of the General's inspection the trench mortar had given no sign of life, though sometimes from the enemy lines came a single rifleshoot, to which our sentries replied.

'Here, a little farther on, is the best loophole in the sector,' said Ottolenghi. 'All the terrain in front can be observed from it as well as the whole of the enemy line. I don't think a better loophole exists than No. 14.'

'Let me have a look at it,' said the General.

'Loophole No. 14!' I said to myself. As I had not been in the sector for several days, I concluded that Ottolenghi had abolished that loophole and given the number to another.

Ottolenghi stopped at the first bend in the trench. There was no alteration in the loopholes; they were just the same as before. There, standing apart, higher than the rest and more conspicuous, was loophole No. 14 with its steel shutter. Ottolenghi stopped on the farther side, leaving it between himself and the General.

'Here it is,' he said to the General, lifting the shutter and suddenly letting it fall again. 'The aperture is small and only one person can look through it at a time.'

I struck some stones with my stick, to attract Ottolenghi's attention. I tried to catch his eye in order to signal to him to stop this. He wouldn't look at me. He understood me well enough, though he would not meet my eye. His face was pale, and my own heart seemed almost to have stopped beating. I instinctively opened my mouth to call the General back, but no sound came. Possibly my agitation prevented me from speaking. I do not want in any way to underestimate my responsibility at that moment. The General was in danger of being shot. I could have prevented it, and I did not say a word.

The General planted himself in front of the loophole, close to the steel shield, bending his head until he almost touched it, and then lifted the shutter and put his eye to the aperture. I shut my eyes.

I cannot say how long I waited. But I heard no shot. Then the General said, 'It's splendid. Splendid!'

I opened my eyes and saw that he was still at the loophole. Without moving away from it, he went on:

'It looks to me now . . . as if that mortar were in the trench. Still, it's not easy to say . . . It might be . . . where the line of the trench is broken . . . but I'm not sure. What a good view this gives! An excellent loophole. Of course the mortar may be mounted a few paces behind the trench . . . in the wood.'

Ottolenghi proceeded to prompt him.

'Look to the left, sir. Can you see a white sandbag?'

'Yes, easily. I can see everything.'

'I think the mortar's over there. There's nothing to be seen, no smoke or anything, but the noise comes from that direction. Can you see, sir?'

'Yes, yes.'

'Don't move, sir. Have a good look at it.'

'It's possible you're right.'

'If you'll permit it, sir, we could open fire. I could bring a machine gun into action. They might then open fire with the mortar as a counter-measure.'

'Very well. Do as you say.'

naked male cherubs, with a wealth of corporeal detail, made her stop and gasp. She put her hands on her hips and stood there with her mouth wide open for a full minute.

Then, flinging her carpet bag on to the snowy pavement, she ran to a ground-floor window, heaved herself up by the ledge and gazed into the room beyond the curtains, with her small eyes light and live. The next moment she was bouncing out into the street again and sliding her foot curiously along the tram rail. Catching sight of the row of frowsy-looking city birds on the telegraph wire, she bent down, gathered a snowball and hurled it at them. The sparrows dropped down like clay birds before finding their numbed wings. She pelted them, bending double with laughter.

Watching the house numbers, she continued down the street, finally stopping before a tall liver-coloured building. As unconcerned as a cat washing its tail, she set about tidying herself, right in the middle of the pavement.

At the back of her head, which was round as an orange, was set a cap, a fiery red headgear gripping her ball of a skull. Two yellow braids, solid chains of metal, ran from her ears to her waist. She undid the ends of these plaits and combed them out with her fingers, replaiting them. Then, quickly, she passed her hand down the row of hooks that fastened her white lambskin jacket. Her breasts, each half as big as her little head, and as hard, pushed out as if she had something alive and eager beneath the fur. She gave her black cloth skirt a tug, rubbed some snow on it to wash the dust out, then stood pivoting within her stiff, wide skirt like the tongue inside the bell of a church tower. Looking down at her blazing apron, she smiled in contentment. Red, pink, orange, ran side by side in long reckless stripes; it was certain that nothing mean or cowardly could exist in the mind that had picked out that colour combination!

Once inside the house, she began to climb the stairs with a great clatter of boots, at each story stopping to consult a slip of paper in her hand, until on the fifth floor she found the name she sought. She undid her woollen glove, white with a beautiful pink

rose woven in the cloth, selected with care a finger, the middle one, and placed it squarely on the button above the letter slot. When the bell gave out a shrill, piercing ring, she laughed uproariously, and letting her finger rest on the button, pushed it with all her might. The house echoed with the sound, as if a fire alarm were being sounded.

Inside the flat, in the front parlour beyond the hallway, two women had been sitting all morning, listening to the wind whistle over the icy street. From time to time it had gathered force, picked up an armful of snow, and rising like a pillar, had torn around the corner.

'If it were to sweep us with it and bash Mama and me to death against a wall, the world would be none the poorer!' the younger woman had thought.

She had longed to go to the window and look out, to press her face against the pane, but years of restraint had tempered her impulses. Moreover, motion was impossible for her; like two carriage horses under a net the coachman had spread across their haunches, Mama and she sat under a huge bed sheet, mending away at a tear in the frail, bone-white stuff, stretched taut across their laps.

She bent her head, and as her needle bored its way through the cloth, her thoughts tramped across the much-trodden country of everyday images. And she saw before her, as always, their flat, poor and genteel; she saw the long street; the large town with all the lifeless people promenading about in it, pressing the city into the earth with their leaden feet. She thought it would be obliging of the wind to carry away all the others, as well as Mama and herself.

'So we're the salt of the earth!' she thought bitterly. 'Why, I could put my hand upon the Bible and swear that I've never stood face to face with one person who had a grain of the stuff in his whole ugly body!'

'Heavens!' she called out suddenly. 'What's that?'

Mama and she jumped up behind the sheet and stood staring at the door, listening to that inane ringing.

'The doorbell must have stuck,' Mama said. 'Who would ring like that? It hurts right down my spine, Aina!'

The hallway was colder than the sitting-room. Aina, hurrying through it, felt as if the bell were ringing inside her own body. For one strange moment it seemed to her that something outside was clamouring to be let in, not only into the flat but into her very being. She trembled with the cold and opened the door.

If someone had thrust a thick posy of flowers, garish and redolent, into her face, she could not have drawn back more hastily. She looked at the blazing red cheeks, the dazzling white fur jacket, then stared in fascination at the finger still pushing the button of the doorbell.

She felt that she was standing before something untamed, something entirely outside her ken. She felt fright, then anger, and shrieked, 'Stop it, can't you? Stop it! *Stop it!*' pushing the finger off the bell and pulling the door toward her.

Then she saw the carpet bag in the girl's hand, and leaned forward, clasping her hands together. 'You aren't . . .? You couldn't be . . .?' Turning, she crossed the hallway in one stride, opened the door of the front parlour, shut it quickly behind her and said, 'Mama — it's the maid. Imagine what the agency has sent! A Kulla.¹ She's out there now!'

'Insolence!' Mama whispered, letting the sheet fall to her feet and jumping up to stand there trembling. 'The terrible, terrible insolence of it!' She clutched at the collar of her much too-youthful dress as if she were choking, laid her fingers over her mouth with the dark ruined teeth in it. 'They're out of their minds, Aina! A Kulla! They think they can send us anything because of the wages — and that awful kitchen . . . Tell her to go away, Aina! Run, can't you?'

But the hall was empty. 'She's gone,' Aina thought. She felt relief, and then — disappointment. That apple face! She would have liked to look at it just once more. One more glimpse she would have liked to have of that terribly clean jacket. She heard

¹ A girl from the poor and forested northerly county of Dalecarlia in Sweden. When the definite article is implied 'Kulla' becomes 'Kullan'.

something moving in the kitchen, empty since the last maid tore out of it in a fury. Aina flung the kitchen door open, and stood once more face to face with Kullan!

She was sitting on the kitchen table, unbuttoning her jacket. Slowly, composedly, she was undoing hook after hook, her fresh white shirt billowing out from under the snowy lambs' fleece. On the floor, beside her flowered carpet bag, stood her two shoes, neatly side by side. She looked up, grinned, and slid down from the table. 'I'm just settling down,' she stated. 'I'm to sleep by the stove here, am I?'

'By the *stove*?' Aina repeated. She looked at the carpet bag on the floor, lying there limp and flat as a pancake. 'Is that all you — is that your baggage?' she found herself asking, the words Mama had placed on her tongue having somehow slithered off and disappeared. 'She's an apple,' she thought. 'A red, red apple.'

Kullan was laughing. 'I've something sweet in that bag, I should say I have!' she called out, and she squatted on the floor, her feet in their clean white stockings wide apart, turning the bag upside down. A cake of soap, a red cloth vest, a shift, a pair of stockings and a curling black sausage fell to the floor. The grip was empty!

'In case I should feel homesick,' she said, sniffing at the sausage. 'Not that I will,' she added, smiling, quickly, warmly. 'Not in this lovely kitchen!' She lifted her nose, a round white radish, toward Aina. 'There's only you and your ma — and two lady boarders, eh? That's all? We'll be as cosy as a nestful of starlings! Run off to your ma now. I'll be right along with a cup of coffee!'

Like a tree in the petrified forest, 'Ma' was sitting in her straight-backed sofa when Kullan came carrying the tray high on her strong arms. Aina's incompetence in dismissing the new maid had brought words like serpent's gall. Perhaps it was the bitterness of those words that had traced deep grooves on either side of Mama's trembling mouth; her body was stiff as a pole with dignity and outraged feelings. Kullan stopped short and whispered, 'Jesus! Is there someone dead in here? Poor old lady! What is she sitting like that for? Has she got a cramp?'

Slamming the tray down on a table, she tore across the room, pulled off her fur jacket and with brusque kindness proceeded to wrap up Mama's stiff unwilling legs in the warm fleece and lay them on the sofa. 'Lordy, what a scare! Poor old Ma, drink a cup of coffee. It'll do you good. Then you can take a little nap.' She looked at Aina, her tiny eyes triumphant. 'I was wonderful at putting fat on the animals, up in Noret. I've got a hand with people too. Poor old thing!' she exclaimed gravely, looking Mama over from her frizzy hair to her too youthful-looking slippers. 'She looks as tired as a mare who's been pulling uphill all day. What luck that I came along! I guess that's what you two have just been saying to each other — such luck. . . .'

Each evening now Aina would sit at dinner, watching the force of Kullan working in the flat, would set her eyes on Kullan's black and red skirt flashing about the table, wrap her glance around Kullan's white-stockinged legs stepping to and fro across the threshold.

Wicked the evening meal had always been, with Mama staring, agonized, at Miss Palm's spoon lying still and disgusted in the soup plate, or at Manda Krug's napkin as it wiped knife, fork and plate, and Manda Krug's hands hurrying into gloves between the courses. Aina now discovered that for one reason and another the four of them had been scared out of their wits: Mama scared of losing her grip on life, holding on to youth with her dark ruined teeth, not daring to age in her short frilly frocks for fear of losing her boarders; Manda, fright's own darling, fearing germs, illness, short life, long death; Miss Palm, youngish, but terrified of slipping; and she, Aina, chronically sheathed in gooseflesh, the peculiar complexion of the faint-hearted.

The first evening that Kullan served at dinner, Aina had to hold on to the table, as if a strong wind were blowing through the room; she felt the floor swaying beneath her as Kullan, flaming like an unclouded noonday sun in her orange-striped apron, ran into the room, plumped the soup tureen right under Mama's nose, blew on her ten fingers, and shouting at the bowl, 'You hot devil, you!' burst into laughter. 'My, only women here, eh!' she

went on, looking at the four white faces, stranded on the shore of this dining-room. 'That's funny, not a single man! Back home in Noret in the cow stable they used to have a big billy goat walking about among the cows — he calmed them, they said. Well, please eat!' she called out, her voice like the cry that a finch gives forth from his red breast. 'Please eat now. There isn't a soul in Noret gets as good soup as this.' She sniffed at the soup over Mama's shoulder, grinned and ran away.

Like a dairy or a hayloft, the flat was scrubbed and swept during the days that followed, Kullan's hands reeling off household duties with lightning speed. Like hailstones in a storm, one task succeeded the next: water she poured into the kettle, a match she struck and put to the fire, she laid the kettle on the range. She set cups, poured out the coffee, then marched through the rooms with the tray held high, like a joyful offering.

Yet she seemed all day to be standing tittering by the kitchen door, to be hanging laughing out of the kitchen window. The soles of her two shoes and two white-stockinged legs sticking stiffly out of a black funnel-shaped skirt greeted Aina daily. The rest of her was invisible, for most of Kullan hung out perilously over the black shaft of the back yard. 'O-hey!' she was calling. 'O-hey, my pretty lad!' to a tall, wide-eyed schoolboy, gazing enamoured at the blinding gold braids swinging up there above the pit.

Or else Kullan's round head with its cap, red as a cranberry, would be nodding to the postman's whiskers, blowing in tempestuous desire in the draught of the wide-open kitchen door. His post bag dangled upon his narrow chest and letters and parcels were kept waiting till he had filled his city lungs with the bracing air which hovered around Kullan, like breezes around a mountain.

During these days, though winter lay hard on the town, immovable as a hibernating bear, Kullan would go for a stroll each evening when her work was done. Her jacket buttoned tight, her hands crossed on her stomach so that the pink roses showed on both gloves, she sauntered through the black snowy streets, stopping only before the goldsmith's and the sweet-monger's for

the sake of the (heartrending beauty) of the red or purple sweets, of the goldware and silverware lying glittering in floods of electricity.

Everyone she met on the empty streets she tried to nod to, and she struck up hot friendships with other lone window-gazers. They looked funny, with their city skirts so tight that they couldn't have taken a free step, and their crazy hats tipped over their eyes; but naked she knew they must have looked just like people in Noret, their hearts on their left side, their bellies in the middle. Just like people in Noret, they were pining to laugh, not to cry, were longing to love a lot, not to hate. That she had guessed right about them she was sure; those she chatted with were at ease with her, as people are with someone who knows their main secret.

And week by week she helped 'Ma' lower herself into the well of old age into which it is so good to sink, so delicious for old men and women. This she knew with her sure knowledge from Noret, where every hut has its old man sitting shaking gently, or its grandma creeping like a beetle across a grass patch as big as a coin. She knew, too, that the difference between the living species is slight, and she cared for her new charges in much the same way that she had cared for the beasts on the farm. Peace soon settled on Aina. Now almost without a tremor she could pass by the corner where the boarders sat grumbling about the food or the icy-cold flat, speaking with loud carrying voices about Kullan and her crazy kin, the folk of Dalecarlia — lustful, arrogant, riding down their rivers as if their floating timber logs were thoroughbreds, peasants, but with faces red as cockscombs from unreasoned pride. They would raise their voices high in the cold room as Aina passed them slowly, deafly, thinking only, 'Why is she so gay? Does she always see red apples dangling from trees? Why is she not afraid? Has she looked at the fox living unarmed in the forest? Why is she so clean? Has she watched how the Dala River lets rubbish sink to its deep bottom as it runs off, clean and frothing, to the sea?'

February and March were trodden out of time; Kullan walked

rapidly across April. The first of May she drove four nails into the four corners of a sheet, covering the indiscreet glass of the kitchen window, heated much water, with her two hands rolled the round laundry tub into the centre of the floor. Then she stuck her head through the door, telling 'Ma', telling Aina, that she was taking her spring bath. She was grave. This was a thing of long tradition; solemnly and in a fitting manner must the spring bath be taken. Clean as an eye opening in resurrection after death must men be when spring shines upon them after the long winter's terror. All doors locked, naked and secretive Kullan walked about in steam as hot as the breath of a horse. All morning she washed and scrubbed. She did not sing. She did not whistle.

That evening she sprinkled her lambskin jacket with the powder that moths abhor, that lays them out in a long cold swoon. She wrapped her jacket and her woollen gloves with the pink roses in brown paper, making of them a little dark wintry package. Out of her carpet bag she took the red cloth vest, lacing it tightly above her shirt and tying a flowered kerchief around her neck. She belonged to spring now, body and soul.

On this day, the first of May, the open air dancing began in Skansen, the green-tufted pleasure park above the town. Girls from those countries where the national costume is still held in honour were admitted free of charge. Kullan ran whistling down Karla Street, ran singing up Karla Hill, thinking of the deep ditches in Noret, filled this evening with girls in green skirts, not dyed green but become thus from lying in the new grass embracing Noret's beautiful boys. Running, she listened to the music from Skansen, where the five finest fiddlers of the capital would be sitting for three long light months now, playing the fiddle, drunk as dukes.

An English ship lay anchored in the harbour, farther out than the merchantman from Suomi, farther than the glittering herring smacks, her brown prow cutting deeply into the bay's ice-free waters. Slim English boys, trim, pink-faced, bashful, were walking two by two in their wide sailor trousers, wending their way

up Karla Hill close on the hurrying heels of Kullan. She turned around, tossed her head, tittered, trotted on. Then she turned again and stared properly. She giggled in her hand, her little eyes narrowing in disdain, her nose knotted in contempt. Lord! What flowers in pants they were, what silky-cheeked sissies! Foreigners! Uff! As a gas balloon swells up with air, so longing puffed out Kullan's heart till it ached for a man from Noret, a bear with a chest like a hillock to lie on, a mate proper for a girl who has washed mightily in preparation for the great Nordic spring.

Suddenly she tipped back on her heels, stopping short like a horse that has trod on its long swishing tail. 'Hey, there!' Someone had sprung out from the line of sailors, stepping squarely on her full swinging skirts. 'What's your hurry, apple?' Into eyes quick as signal lights she looked, into a red-whiskered face. Ox-necked he was, with a chest wide as a sofa, printed over with fish-scaled strumpets, fish-tailed wenches. An arm like the oar of a boat was flung at her and swept Kullan off the pavement; with his other arm he ushered her through the turnstile. A plunging coin was left in their wake for the gate-keeper to dive for. Close together they hurried down Odin's Way, stumbling in their frenzied hurry, running, winded, toward their urgent goal.

They stopped. They looked away from each other and grinned, but then, catching each other's eyes, they no longer grinned, knowing with a single glance that if they could not speak a common language, the eighteen delights of spring they could perform in perfect unison. The first bird fluttered down, his claws touching the ends of the light grass; Kullan's fingers pointed him out to the sailor. The first green tree grew by her side with cold buds along its boughs. This the sailor pointed out to Kullan, then jerked his head backward with a question. 'Yes, yes!' Kullan nodded. Like two thirsty waves they fell against each other behind the trunk of the slender tree.

Later, on the red dance floor, every man jigging with his arms loaded then and there recognized Kullan as a girl who takes spring seriously. Quicker than God on doomsday will separate

the wheat from the chaff does a man single out a girl who knows May from the other months of the year and keeps her flag waving high above that breezy month! The sailor had to bellow like a bull to keep his find to himself, had to push his elbows to right and left to prevent his precious cargo from leaving his rolling ship. When the couples clung limply to each other's waists, when the trees and all that lived in them were hushed, Kullan left the dance floor, nimbly finding the deepest ditch. And then it was just as in Noret. Oh, very seriously did Kullan take spring!

From then on every evening as long as May lasted, a song came from the maid's dark room, a chorus of whisperings and titterings. As generously as any furry inmate of Noret's forests, Kullan gave the seasonal gift of love. The ladies, reading in the late light of the spring evenings, would stare in alarm at Aina, the youngest amongst them, then break out into loud conversation in order to overpower the lusty laughter, the fiery whispering, which could be heard behind Kullan's door. After much talk, much forced coughing, the love duet beyond the hallway would die down; silence, even more embarrassing, would reign. The ladies, blushing, again took up their reading.

Only Aina never turned her pages. It's the sailor, she thought, amazed at her new acceptance. It's the postman. Or the school-boy across the yard. And one by one they marched across her unturned pages. She saw the schoolboy, sixteen, long-armed, with wide dreamy eyes, young heart-shaped face, in love, in love. Long thin legs he had, with narrow trousers not reaching to the shoes, not covering his ankles. He was kissing Kullan and embracing her, hiding his face with tears of ecstasy in Kullan's blonde neck! Or the postman: a uniformed mouse, the governmental cap on his head of meagre intelligence, the state's post bag slung across his lean chest, approaching Kullan's bed with marriage thoughts, licensed love in each measured step. Or perhaps the foreign sailor: a great wild man, a tall mariner with his ox-neck burnt red as a turkey, his chest printed blue with mermaids. He was running from his ship to Kullan's room, a whispering-shell in his hand, stopping repeatedly — the tall strong

man, the red-haired gorilla — to hold the shell to his ear, to make sure for the thousandth time that the murmuring of the sea was adequate to tell Kullan all that his heart called out so loudly, all that his foreign tongue could not say.

When June dipped toward July, when the town was as white at night as in the day, when at dawn the vans came clattering into town bringing berries in hundreds of baskets, leaving whiffs of warm berry smells in the streets, 'Ma' noticed, Aina noticed, Miss Palm, Manda Krug noticed, that Kullan was lacing her vest wider, ever wider. How far would that ribbon stretch? asked the boarders of each other. Side by side they stood prophesying an event, as they bade 'Ma' farewell on the eve of their yearly departure, casting glances toward the well of iniquity beyond the hallway, announcing that they would not return next year, they owed it to themselves to seek other pasturage, wholesomer fields.

Aina, her mind black as tar, seeing before her inner eye the boarders' rooms empty, 'Ma's' teeth chewing at thin air, 'Ma's' hands clasped around her own helpless neck, pressed her forehead against the window-pane, following a tern's flight. The strokes of the tough, tenacious wings made her own weakness flagrant; as loathsome she seemed to herself as the two useless women behind her whose clammy hands had never fashioned anything, never earned anything. And she recollected a winter morning five months before when, mending a bed sheet, she had sat in this very room wanting the wind to whip her — the most despicable of all objects, a futile woman — had wanted the wind to beat her to death against the side of the building.

The tern lay wrestling on a cushion of air, its feathers on end, then, taking decision, shot arrow-straight, purposeful, toward the mast-speckled harbour. Aina also swung around to face the boarders, her hands out like wings. 'How strange,' she cried, her voice strong, as if the waters of the bay had coursed down the channel of her throat, clearing its banks of clogging weeds. 'What a coincidence! This moment I was going to announce that I will be unable to take boarders in the future. We are leaving this flat, Mama and I, to move to smaller quarters. You see, I am

going to begin to work this autumn. Yes — to work . . .’ She took a step toward ‘Ma’s’ sofa, started to laugh in sheer amazement. Grabbing ‘Ma’s’ hand, she folded it double within hers and squeezed it. She knew that she had taken the step across. She smiled, trembled, pressed her hand to her breast, not caring who saw her. She found that both she and ‘Ma’ were staring toward the kitchen door. As close as two halves of a heart were they, through their mutual feeling for her who lived so noisily, so lustily, behind that door.

On an August noonday, eating yellow plums, Aina returned to the flat to find Kullan at the top of the stairs, her carpet bag under her arm. Aina’s hands went out to ward off the blow; her mouth opened, then shut.

She saw that Kullan stood ready for the road, that she had new shoe laces tied with double knots and had washed her face till it was fine and fresh as a bun baked solely with wheat flour, no corn meal mixed in at all! The sun, falling through the skylight, shone on her temples. Then suddenly Aina began to sob, looking no longer at Kullan’s face, but comparing that carpet bag, as flat and as poor-looking as the day she saw it first, with Kullan’s large, swelling waist, where all that she had acquired in the city was being carried. Rich and magnificent it looked beside the cloth bag, that was poor as Kullan would always be poor. ‘She’ll eat little butter all her life,’ thought Aina. ‘Cake seldom. Cake very seldom,’ she thought, the tears dropping from her eyes.

She realized that Kullan really was off now, and she didn’t do anything about it, paying her the greatest compliment she could by remaining silent. Not with a single gesture did she question her going; and remembering how it had seemed equally unthinkable to ask Kullan to leave once she had arrived, she felt the devoutness and obscure tightening at the heart that she had once experienced in the sudden shadow of a great cloud of migratory birds passing over her head; at that exact hour, at that minute, they were going because they had felt something in the air, or perhaps because they had heard a sound.

But Kullan was coming toward her, walking rapidly in spite

of what she carried beneath her orange-striped apron, its cloth stretched taut as it never had been since it lay on the loom. Smiling, Kullan reached out her hand, quickly and warmly, toward Aina, her eyes laughing, her whole being quivering with light and life. Generally, Aina thought, she would have felt pity for a servant maid's offspring who was to be flung out into the world, would have mourned for it as for a child dropped amongst gibbering geese in a swamp, to toddle about in slush-filled shoes. At the thought of him whom Kullan was now carrying off, she had to smile instead.

If only I could hoist her up on a church spire, she thought, to stand firm in the wind with her large waist and her empty bag, her skirts flying out like the sails in the harbour, for all of us to look at, wondering at the nature of the wings that have raised her above our plane of fear to regions of eternal gaiety.

'Thank goodness you came!' she cried, for now her hand was lying in Kullan's and they were standing looking at each other stoutly, smiles on their lips.

'The agency sent me to you,' Kullan said. 'It was your address they gave me!' she laughed and moved on.

Aina thought, 'I can see her once more,' and running to the living-room, she pressed her face against the windows.

Down the street, empty in mid-day, walked Kullan in her wide skirt, the flowered bag swinging by her side.

The Beautiful Fire

BY I. V. MORRIS

(From *Story*)

'DAMN!' said Leslie Adams to his own face in the glass. He had cut himself while shaving, and already a thin red line had appeared on the finely-modelled cheek reflected in the bathroom mirror. The line thickened as he gazed at it; now a trickle of blood ran out of it and coursed downward to his chin. Leslie Adams seized a towel, drenched it and held the wet cloth to the cut.

Damn! he thought again. This was going to retard his dressing, and he had none too much time as it was; at any moment he expected to hear the clock striking eight, the dinner hour. His thoughts flew to the stick of alum which Lucy had bought for use in these emergencies, but on the point of looking for it, he remembered the burning pain that alum caused. Fully conscious that he was deceiving himself, he decided that it would be too difficult to find amongst the litter in the medicine chest. Besides, the only guest to-night was Marjorie, who would take his lateness almost for granted. And of course Jordan, who was staying in the house. But he'd be blown if he was going to inflict torture on himself just so that Mr. Jordan shouldn't have to wait for dinner.

The towel held to his cheek, he wandered over to his bedroom window and gazed out upon the lawn. Down by the rhododendron bushes, alongside the kitchen porch, a Ford coupé stood parked, and he had to stare at it awhile before puzzling out its presence there. Why, of course! It belonged to the électrician, come to attend to the short circuit; he ought to be able to recognize the car by now, considering the amount of electric trouble they had had since moving into this country house. In the six months that had elapsed they had been honoured by a regular series of visits from the estimable owner of that Ford coupé!

As he stood there at the window, Leslie realized that there was something else about which he had been meaning to speak to the electrician — something quite important, indeed. What was it? For the moment he could not recall, yet the certainty that he had meant to tell the man something persisted. He well knew the futility of trying to locate a missing thought by force. The best way, Leslie decided, was not to search for it, and probably his mind would bring it to the surface at its own good date and time.

The cut had not stopped bleeding — a glance in the mirror told him as much — and by now his towel was quite spotted with blood. He wet it again, this time in hot water, and gingerly dabbed at the wound. Then he walked back to his bedroom and knelt before the log fire, burning brightly at one end. It was pleasant here on the rough bear rug, which felt warm to his touch from the heat of the flames, and he really did not regret this little incident which had given him a few moments' respite before his plunge into the evening. With wide-open eyes he peered into the fire, making a game of looking at the flames without squinting or winking his eyes. How he loved, how he always had loved, fire! How beautiful it was! No room, he thought, glancing appreciatively about this one, was complete without logs blazing in the corner, and this was as true now, in September, as it would be in February. What if it still was a bit early, a bit warm, for fires? Seeing that Lucy did not object, was there any reason why he should not have them? She was a good girl, Lucy — she did not often object to his individual, perhaps eccentric ways.

Then, at the thought of Lucy, he experienced a little twinge, as he had been doing these last weeks, ever since — well, ever since the arrival of that letter with the Chinese postmark, to be precise. Funny that he should, when he knew so well and had known for so many years that Jordan no longer meant anything in her life. It was as if the man were dead, and if he now showed the doubtful taste of popping up out of the grave, that could have no effect on their well-ordered and successful marriage. Was it not

on his own initiative, and actually against Lucy's wishes, that Jordan had been invited down for this week-end? You couldn't say that that was the action of a jealous man! No, he certainly wasn't going to show himself petty at this stage of the game. He did not grudge Lucy her past before she met him, and indeed, why should he, seeing that it was he, Leslie, who had come out on top? Was he not Lucy's husband and the father of Lucy's children, whereas the once redoubted Jordan was no more than a soured bachelor, forced to spend his days in some outlandish corner of the globe!

The clock on the staircase whirled, then began to strike the hour. He jumped up and hastened to the mirror in the bathroom, taking away the towel to examine the cut upon his cheek. It had stopped bleeding, though a tiny crust of blood still disfigured the smooth skin, marring that delicate, aesthetic appearance of which he was so proud. He was not at all satisfied with his looks to-night, even after slipping on the black velvet jacket which he habitually wore when he dined at home; somehow that ugly smudge on his face detracted from the harmony of the whole!

Up the well of the staircase came to him Jordan's voice, the words clipped and dry, as usual; probably he had finished dressing long ago and was sitting with Lucy in the hall. Leslie, standing on the first floor landing, strained his ears in vain to hear, deciding finally that nothing of great interest could be said in such a prosaic, uninspiring voice. He wondered if Lucy could help comparing it to his own melodious manner of speaking. He never had understood what she, or any other woman, saw in that dull, unimaginative fellow, and now that he was able to judge Jordan completely dispassionately, his former opinion remained unchanged. He lacked charm; he was — well, he simply was a citizen of another world! They could say what they liked; there was no getting around the fact that a man with money and breeding was the superior of one who never had had and never would have either of those things.

About to descend the stairs, Leslie suddenly changed his mind, taking the corridor to the right instead of to the left, and

presently he found himself walking down the servants' staircase at the rear of the house. The distribution of the rooms permitted him to attain the ground floor or even leave the building without anybody noticing, and while he had no reason for maintaining secrecy, the knowledge that he could do so if he wished afforded Leslie a peculiar satisfaction. On his way through the pantry, he heard the sound of an automobile self-starter, and peered out of the window just in time to see the electrician's Ford disappearing down the driveway. Not till then did he remember what it was he had wanted to tell the fellow. It had to do with those two loose wires he had noticed in the cloakroom at the foot of the stairs. He had found them hanging from the ceiling, suspended there without any apparent purpose, and that they were alive was amply proved when he tried to pull them down, for he received for his pains an electric shock that almost bowled him over. The curious thing was that the electrician had been around at least twice since that day, yet each time he had forgotten to mention about the wires, remembering only when it was too late.

I must not fail to tell him next time, he reflected as he gently pushed open the door leading into the hall and walked forward on the soft carpeting.

Whatever he had expected, or feared, to see, he experienced something like a letdown when he walked around the screen and came in sight of Lucy and Jordan before the fireplace. They were sitting neither on the sofa nor even on adjoining chairs, but at some distance from each other, Lucy snug in her favourite arm-chair, almost hidden out of sight, with Jordan squatting cross-legged on a footstool before the fire, which formed a background for his blunt, impassive features. She gave a start and looked up at him in irritation.

'Oh Leslie, I wish you wouldn't come in like that. You scared me!'

'Sorry,' said Leslie, beginning to laugh, he did not quite know why, and going up to Lucy, kissed her forehead. He noticed, it was not for the first time of late, an instinctive stiffening of her body as he approached her.

'I went down the back stairs to have a word with the electrician,' he felt called upon to explain. 'I've been meaning to tell him about a couple of loose wires that want fixing, but he drove off before I had the chance.'

'Show them to me,' said Jordan. 'I'm by way of being an amateur electrician.'

'No, no, certainly not,' Leslie quickly rejected the offer. 'It can wait for his next visit. Let me give you one bit of advice though, Jordan: don't ever buy a renovated Colonial house. You'd be letting yourself in for a pack of trouble.'

'Not likely to,' said Jordan. He picked up the poker and gave the smouldering logs a jab.

'Ah, nothing as nice as a fire!' declared Leslie, holding out his tapering hands to the blaze, thus showing them off to best advantage. 'A house isn't a home without fires burning. They make it cosy.'

'A cosy hothouse,' said Lucy.

Leslie laughed and patted Lucy's soft attractive shoulder.

'Don't try and be biting, dearest; it doesn't suit you. You're much more charming when you're smiling and good-humoured. You agree with me, Jordan?'

'Well, yes. It certainly is hot in here, though!'

'Never too hot for a fire,' insisted Leslie. 'I love fire better than anything in the world — I'm a real fire worshipper, in fact. Last year when Lucy and I were in Canada, we happened to run right into a big forest fire and, will you believe it, that I enjoyed watching that fire more than anything we did all summer! A whole wood burned down, leaving nothing but charred stumps. It was beautiful!'

'Must have been an expensive show for someone!'

'Jordan, you are a real utilitarian,' said Leslie, laughing. 'Always figuring in dollars and cents, aren't you?'

He mentioned money with the confident tone of a man who has always had it addressing one whose very nature assured his remaining poor.

A ring at the doorbell announced Marjorie's arrival, and as

Lucy went out into the hallway to greet her, Leslie quickly lit a cigarette and assumed his favourite stance, back against the fireplace, one arm stretched out along the mantel; by raising himself unnoticeably on his toes, he gained a welcome inch or two of height. Jordan, continuing to crouch there on the footstool, was completely overshadowed. For a moment it seemed to Leslie that this former rival of his was too insignificant even to be considered as an equal!

'Welcome, Marjorie!' he called out, listening pleasurably to the sound of his musical, cultured voice. 'You are fifteen minutes late.'

'Now don't be pompous again,' Marjorie answered, coming into the room with short, decisive steps which contrasted with Lucy's slow, womanly manner of walking. 'You know very well that you only just got down yourself. Well, aren't you going to introduce us?'

'Naturally. This is Mr. Phelps Jordan, just back from China.'

Marjorie shook hands with Jordan, who jumped up from his footstool, then squatted down on it again. Was Leslie mistaken, or had he detected a look of astonishment skim over Marjorie's clever face as he pronounced that name, Phelps Jordan? Was it possible that she had heard things? Feeling decidedly self-conscious, Leslie left the fireplace and strolling up to his wife, placed his arm about her waist. The fact that this time she did not draw back, instead patted his hand rather ostentatiously, seemed to him a bad sign. So Lucy had noticed something too, and was combining with him to throw Marjorie off the scent!

The maid carried in the ingredients for cocktails and Leslie stepped up to the table to mix the drinks.

'Wait a moment! Let Phelps do it,' said Lucy. 'He's just been telling me about a divine drink they make in Shanghai and he promised to mix it for us. Go on, Phelps. Get busy!'

Jordan looked up at Leslie for permission.

'Of course, old man, let's see what you can do,' said Leslie, ceding his place by the table and even giving Jordan a little slap on the back which he knew at once must appear insincere and affected.

Without speaking a word, Jordan began to mix the drink, measuring out precise quantities from four bottles into the shaker, which he manipulated with short staccato movements; then he emptied the contents into glasses and handed them about.

'Goody!' said Lucy, taking a sip of hers and passing her little tongue appreciatively over her lips.

'But this is absolutely superb!' shouted Leslie. 'Superb! I've never tasted anything so delicious. No wonder that you've stayed in Shanghai these last six years. I'm for China on the next boat!'

They all liked the cocktails, but no one was so enthusiastic as Leslie, who kept sipping at his glass as if it were filled with nectar, and each time crowed in ecstasy. However, when he put it down on the mantelpiece, it was still a good third full.

'You didn't like that drink much, did you?' Marjorie whispered to him as they followed the others into the dining-room.

'Why of course I did,' said Leslie, taken aback.

'H'm,' said Marjorie, and on her lips he thought he saw a knowing little smile.

There was no time for further protest now, but during dinner he did his best to dispel any suspicions about his feelings toward Jordan; he was more than affable to him, shrieked with laughter at his one or two not particularly funny stories, did his best to draw him out in conversation by a veritable flow of questions about China and the East. Jordan answered politely, usually in monosyllables, and practically never said anything original, witty, or even interesting. If anything was clear, it was that he did not care what impression he created, and somehow this knowledge was particularly riling to his host. But the most annoying thing of all was that without Jordan's saying anything worth while, he simply monopolized the interest of the two women. When Leslie launched out on a new story of his own, relating it in his inimitable way, it fell on deaf ears. He could not help feeling piqued, especially when he remembered what a good sport he was being by merely having the fellow in the house!

Soon after dinner they sat down to bridge. Jordan partnered

Marjorie, while Leslie and his wife as usual played together, and as usual won. Leslie was just short of being a brilliant player, and granted a fair distribution of cards, there was no doubt which team would finish up on top. Jordan played his hands quickly but without inspiration, snapping the cards on to the green baize with an impersonal flick of his wrist which was like a reflex action. He made no mistakes, yet won no rubbers, and it was apparent that the result neither vexed nor disappointed him. For some reason both women felt called upon to compliment Jordan on his play, while Leslie's perfect bridge, taken for granted as it was, aroused no comment.

That is the way it has always been, he reflected, feeling an unreasonable resentment. I have invariably won and he has lost, yet he doesn't seem to care — and what is more, no one else has been much impressed about it either.

At eleven o'clock the party broke up, Marjorie complaining of a headache and her inability to hold a winning hand.

'I'm nervous to-night,' she said as she stood in the doorway, saying good night to Leslie. 'There is a storm in the air; I shan't sleep well.'

'No sign of anything so far,' Leslie answered, motioning at the moonlit sky.

'Under the horizon, Leslie, under the horizon. There are dark clouds and fire under the horizon, though we cannot see them yet.'

When Marjorie had driven off, Leslie bolted the front door and came back into the sitting-room to find Jordan finishing his nightcap. Lucy, tired, had already gone up to her room.

'Charming girl, Marjorie, isn't she?' said Leslie, not out of conviction, merely in order to say something.

'Well — yes.'

'How do you find Lucy looking?' Leslie asked, knowing the question to be a tactless one. 'Handsome, isn't she?'

'Yes indeed.'

'She wasn't so well until the first child was born,' Leslie pursued, watching Jordan from the corner of his eye. 'Had one thing and another the matter with her all the time. What does

women more good than anything is having kids, you know — that and a steady life. She's been fit as a daisy since she became a mother.'

'Well, that's fine,' said Jordan, draining his glass. 'That's fine.'

'Marriage is a grand affair,' Leslie exulted, getting in his parting blow. 'Ought to find a nice girl and try it yourself, old man!'

Even as he spoke, he felt that this tactlessness of his was inexcusable, yet he had an uncontrollable desire to make the man wince, to detect at least a tiny reaction on his expressionless countenance. And the fact that there was none made matters infinitely worse. All that Jordan answered was, 'Nothing like that for me!'

This obstinate refusal to acknowledge the situation was nothing short of a studied insult! Suddenly Leslie felt rising within him all that old hatred of Jordan which he thought he had long since forgotten. Had he at that moment held a pistol, he might well have aimed it at his head.

They left the sitting-room, Leslie switching off the lights, and on the way upstairs Jordan remarked, 'Oh, I forgot to tell you — I have several reels of film with me, taken in Mongolia. If you're interested, I'll run them off for you to-morrow.'

'Splendid! Splendid!' said Leslie, mustering up a show of enthusiasm. 'We'll give a movie performance in the afternoon and have the children in. Splendid idea, old man!' (But why the 'old man', he wondered. A ridiculous expression and one that he never used.)

'I've put the films in that cloak-room at the foot of the stairs — my camera, too. Will they be safe there?' asked Jordan.

'In the cloak-room? Of course they'll be safe. Safe as anywhere. Why shouldn't they?'

'Oh, no reason. I only asked.'

'Yes, they'll be perfectly all right,' Leslie repeated once again with emphasis, and a moment later the two had said good night and parted.

'Hope you'll sleep well!' Leslie called after his guest down the corridor, to which Jordan answered, 'I've slept through two

Chinese revolutions and an earthquake. Nothing ever wakens me.'

Lucky for him, thought Leslie, as he undressed to the accompaniment of the wind sighing in the treetops and whistling under the eaves of the house. Probably Marjorie was right and there would be a real storm before the morning. But as he lay beneath the sheets, trying in vain to compose his mind for sleep, he kept straining his hearing for other sounds as well. Once he thought he heard a floorboard creak as though someone were walking down the corridor, and in a second he was out of bed and standing at the hallway door to listen. Nothing further reached his ears, so he presumed that he must have been mistaken. Still he kept listening, without figuring out what he was listening for.

When an hour had passed and the clock struck one, he felt as wide awake as ever. He thought of going to Lucy's room, as he so often did when sleep eluded him, but almost at once struck the idea from his mind. What would she think if he came to her bedroom now? Doubtless she'd suspect that he wished to assure himself that she was there, rather than in the guest chamber. How ignominious for him! And how unjust, when the real reason for his wanting to go to her was so different! No, rather than let Lucy believe such a thing, he'd lie awake alone all night. Or take a sleeping draught, much as he disliked the remedy.

In fact at half-past one he did slip out of bed and made his way to the medicine chest in the hall, where the little box of green-coloured capsules was kept. By now it was blowing violently outside and gusts of wind were whistling around the house corners. There must have been a window open downstairs, for he heard a door bang, and walking along the corridor, felt a draught of air which appeared to be blowing up the staircase. He contemplated going downstairs to close it, but the prospect of stumbling about for the electric light switch in the dark did not entice him, and he decided that it would mean catching his death of cold.

Just like it was with that damned alum before dinner, he reflected. Any excuse to pamper myself! But as always when he grew conscious of a certain flabby aspect of his character, he hastily switched his thoughts aside.

Returning to his bedroom, Leslie was forced to pass by Lucy's door, and seeing that he was there, leaned down and put his ear to the keyhole. The rhythmic sound of her breathing reached him clearly and unmistakably. Leslie, as he continued on his way, told himself that he was pleased she had not been disturbed by the slamming door and the other noises of the approaching storm.

A voice calling 'Leslie! Leslie!' aroused him from drugged sleep. As he struggled up in bed, he noticed a strong smell in his nostrils, as of something burning, and switching on the light, found the whole room filled with a thin haze; the opposite wall with the Beerbohm drawing seemed to be covered by a gauze veil. Leslie flung himself out of bed and pulled his door open, and there was Lucy standing in the smoke-laden corridor in her nightgown; she had not even put on her dressing gown; her feet were bare.

'Good God!' cried Leslie, and as clearly as if he were at that moment standing in the downstairs cloak-room, he had a vision of those dangling loose wires he never could remember to repair. Then another thought came to him too. The films! Jordan had put them in the cloak-room for safe-keeping. Inflammable as they were, how easily could a spark have set them ablaze, and fanned by the draught, it would not have taken long for the flames to spread.

But Lucy was already running down the hallway toward the nursery in the rear of the house and he found himself hurrying after her. Naturally, the two children were sound asleep; they had to be shaken hard before being awakened. Telling Lucy to lead them into safety while he warned the other members of the household, he proceeded down the corridor to rouse the nurse and the two maids. Then, descending to the pantry, where the atmosphere was thick enough to make his eyes smart, he telephoned to the fire department in the next town. It took him at least a minute to make the operator answer, and another before the station was on the line, and all the time the smoke in the pantry

was getting thicker; he could see it blowing in plumes in under the swinging door leading to the hall.

When he had given his address and name, Leslie ran up the back stairs again, detaching a fire extinguisher from the wall on his way. Armed with this implement, he sallied into the corridor and began walking toward the main staircase, which seemed to be the central point of the conflagration. The smoke was even thicker by now, and he could not see his own bedroom door, though he passed within some inches of it; his eyes hurt so that he had to close them and make his way forward blindly. When he reached the top of the staircase, he opened his eyes a crack and looked down. Heavy black smoke was spiralling upward, and in that smoke there now were flames; apparently the whole staircase was ablaze and any thought of venturing on it would have to be abandoned. Even standing here he felt dizzy; he might well be overcome if he did not seek clearer air.

Dropping the extinguisher, Leslie started to retreat, then stopped dead in his tracks, assailed by sudden intolerable anguish. Jordan! What about Jordan, sleeping in the guest-room at the other end of the corridor? How was it possible he had not thought of him before, when his first act had been to wake up the servants? His lapse was inexplicable. The thought of Jordan came to Leslie as a blow, in a sense an even greater blow than the fire itself had been. It struck him suddenly that while this fire was a disaster, it was a reparable disaster, having certain fixed dimensions, while his failure, or refusal, to think of Jordan was a disaster without limits and whose ultimate consequences could not even be foreseen.

Leslie turned and picked his way slowly down the corridor, his hand feeling for the inner wall to make sure of his bearings. The guest-room door was the last one along the corridor, next to that of the linen closet. He had to grope about for the door knob for several seconds, and when he at last located it, it was only to find that the door was locked. Because of the smoke, he did not dare open his mouth to call, but he banged at the door and even kicked it with his foot. There was no answer from within.

By this time he was feeling positively faint. His throat ached unbearably and his head was swimming; his lungs called out for a breath of air. Leslie remembered that the front porch of the house extended directly beneath Jordan's room. It would have been an easy drop from his window on to the roof of this porch, whence he could have clambered to the ground. Telling himself that this is what Jordan must have done, Leslie began to retrace his steps; he felt he had done everything that was humanly possible to warn Jordan of his danger.

In a state of near-collapse, he struggled back along the corridor and after what seemed many-minutes reached the staircase at the rear. Sliding rather than stepping down the stairs, he attained the ground floor and staggered through the kitchen door into the open. He had to bend double and cough to clear his throat and lungs of smoke and he pulled out his handkerchief to wipe his smarting eyes. At last he was able to collect himself; still bending over, he began to run around the building, towards the front.

As he turned the corner, he almost bumped into Lucy, looking grotesque in somebody's huge overcoat that she had thrown on over her nightgown. She seized him by the arms, and her face appeared to him tense, half-demented, in the dark.

'Where is Phelps? Isn't he with you?'

Leslie shook his head, feeling a sick sensation come over him.

'I banged at his door, but it was locked,' he said. 'I supposed he'd got out through the bedroom window.'

'Oh God!' Lucy shouted. 'He's still in the house! He's going to be killed! Oh God!'

'I did my best. I banged on his door,' repeated Leslie, though a terrible thought had now arisen in his mind: would he ever be quite sure that it was Jordan's door that he had knocked upon, rather than that of the adjoining linen closet? No, he could never be quite sure of that — nothing would ever make him sure! 'I did my best,' he insisted stubbornly.

'*Your* best!' cried Lucy, her voice one of despair, and she began running toward the kitchen porch, just as there came to them from the distance the clanging of a fire-engine bell. She hesitated

a second, then turned and darted down the drive, while Leslie, after a second's hesitation, followed after her, preparing in his mind an explanation, a justification. Better even than her words had her action confirmed his secret knowledge: it was Jordan, not he, whom Lucy loved.

Half-way down the drive, Leslie turned to look back at the house. By now the whole upper part of the structure was hidden by a curtain of smoke. Dense streams of smoke were pouring from an open downstairs window, and flashing through them ever and again could be seen the red of flames. It was a terrible and beautiful sight. Seized by its sheer grandeur, Leslie stopped where he was and stood for a moment watching the work of destruction which was going forward so rapidly in his house. Mingling with his horror, he could not fight down a certain sense of appreciation, almost of satisfaction. In some way this was what he had always wanted: a real fire, an even greater fire than that forest conflagration he had seen in Canada, a fire of which he himself was the secret instigator. For during a second, or a split-second, while he stood there watching the flames, he understood that he had really planned this thing to happen and willed that it should happen while Jordan was in the house.

Then he recollected himself and remembered that it was a sheer coincidence that Jordan's return from China should correspond with an occurrence that might mean his death. Just one of those queer tricks of fate! Yet even as he decided this, a voice whispered in his ear that fate has a habit of working itself out through unconscious, perhaps not unwilling, agents.

Leslie put up his hand before his smarting eyes, and it seemed to him that by that gesture, with which he erased the sight of his for ever ruined home, he was also trying to blind himself to the greater fire which already had begun to consume the lofty structure of his self-esteem.

The Way Death Comes

BY PRUDENCIO DE PEREDA

(From *Story*)

NOW death was coming for the horse in a way that it came seldom to horses. He lay on his side in the bull-ring sand, just in front of section three, with all his entrails stretching out bloodily and very wet from his ripped belly, and he waited there. He was the second horse to take the charge of the great black bull, Oficial, and Oficial was the fourth and the last bull in the benefit fight held in Madrid on Thursday afternoon. The benefit was for the victims of the bombing of Morata, a quiet and unimportant little town that lay about forty-five miles north of Madrid. These were the first months of the war, and Angel Segura, called Conquistador, or the Conqueror, was the chief matador.

Oficial had charged the white horse first while the brown had stood in front of section three with the picador mounted and ready, and, as he stood in the clear, waiting, the white horse had pissed nervously. The picador, Pascal, had let him piss, then kned him into position, and then they waited for the bull to come. The horse could not see anything. His eyes were bandaged, but he waited with his feet firmly planted in the sand, and feeling those good knees on his ribs. Pascal's knees reassured him stiffly until the bump came and he was lifted high, high up, as high as he thought he could ever go, and then higher, even higher, when all his four feet went up from the ground and he suddenly went over.

They hit the ground and the protective mattress slipped aside from his belly with the fall. The bull's swiftly pricking horn went into his belly there, and then slipped along on a rising pain, and he went far, far away with it. Then, the bull went away.

Quickly, the monos, the ring servants, slipped the saddle off his back, and he was left bare and bleeding. They did not try to raise him up. This one was done for. The fight had gone to another

part of the ring, now, and he was left alone there, waiting for death and a canvas cover. And death was coming!

And, up in the stands, too, all around him; all, all around him, and not the rich in the shade and the poor in the sun, were the people who had felt death come many times, now, and could look at him and know. They could look at him for only a short minute before they had turned to watch the matador take the bull away from the third horse, but they knew.

Conquistador, the matador, took the bull out and away from the fence and into the ring's centre. The people watched him end the series of passes with a beautiful media-veronica, where he turned with the cape held out from the right hip as the bull followed its billowed openness around the man, who revolved slowly until the bull had gone all around him and then stopped shock still to face his back. Then, as they looked and remembered their deaths coldly and suddenly, Angel walked languidly away from the bull with studied quietness and ease, without once turning his head and trailing his cape, held easily at the hip, along in the sand. The people sucked in their breaths. They stared at the sharply pointed horns of the big black bull, and at the slow-moving, thin figure.

Angel Segura was a tall dark boy with a good-looking peasant's face and a slim, pliable body. He flicked his cape up with his hand and walked over to the fence. The banderilla and capemen would take the bull now. At the fence he handed his cape over to Chucho. Chucho held out a small paper cup with water.

'They're quiet,' he said slowly.

'Too quiet!' Angel said. 'They're too quiet. Where's Garcia?'

'Over to your right, Angel.' Angel looked to the side and saw his manager, Garcia, standing by the fence and staring over at him. Garcia was leaning on the barrera and slowly puffing at a cigar that he held in his mouth with two fingers and did not seem very aware of.

'This still doesn't please him, eh?' Angel said to Chucho.

'No, hombre, it doesn't. He's still sore! But don't you worry yourself about him.'

'No. This is a good bull, Chuch!' Angel said, and Chucho, the sword-handler, whose only son had been killed in one of the first bombardments of the city, said, 'Yes! Yes!' The son had been three years old, and very bright, and very active. 'Yes!' Chucho said. 'Yes, this is a good bull. You're going great with him, too, Chief.'

'No, I'm not. No! I can't get started to-day. I can't get going.'

'You're going fine, hombre. That was a great quité, there!'

'Yes?' Angel said. 'I wasn't feeling it. I'm not feeling anything to-day,' he said. He was looking out into the ring, watching Mariano place the banderillas. He nodded his head back toward the crowd. 'They're not feeling anything, either. Look, they didn't even call for me to place the banderillas.'

In a fight, when the bull shows bravely and courageously in the early charging, and the matador has worked him well with the cape, the crowd will call for the matador, the Maestro, to place the banderillas, so that he will have fought the great enemy completely and on all fronts.

'They're not back into things yet, Chief,' Chucho said. 'It takes a long time to get back to anything normal now. The shelling, you know, the —'

Garcia had come up behind them and was standing at Chucho's elbow, now. He was puffing silently at the cigar that he still held firmly between two thin fingers. Angel felt him there and turned around suddenly. His face brightened when he looked at Garcia.

'Hello, you!' he said. 'Good fight in spite of all, eh?'

'It's a good bull,' Garcia said quietly. Chucho reached out his hand suddenly to take the paper cup from Angel. He tossed the water out on the sand and dropped the cup inside. Then he bent down to get the sword and muleta. He knocked against Garcia many times as he was doing these things. Garcia only looked at him coldly. He was only a sword-handler! Then, Garcia turned to Angel. 'He took the cigar out of his mouth very deliberately.'

'I have news for you,' he said.

'Yes?' said Angel.

'Chief,' Chucho said. 'Ready?' he said quietly.

Angel looked at him and then back to Garcia. The brightness was draining out of his face.

'I have news for you,' Garcia said again.

'Maestro,' Chucho said. 'You —'

'Yes, yes, hombre!' Angel said to Garcia. 'What? What are you going to tell me?'

'Maestro, you had better hurry,' Chucho said. 'They're ready. It's a long way over to the campesinos' box, too.' Angel looked at him and Chucho blushed. The campesinos were the peasants from Morato who had come to represent the town at the corrida. Angel was to dedicate this bull to them. Now he stared at his friend. Is the world mad to-day? he thought.

Chucho became very red, but he did not turn away. He held up the sword handle to Angel and was opening his mouth to say, 'Take it!' when Garcia's quiet voice cut into them and said to Angel, 'They killed your brother!'

Angel had put his hand on the sword. He grabbed at the handle now. 'Heh?' he said. Angel's brother was a lieutenant in the People's Republican Army. 'Heh? He was killed?'

'They killed him,' Garcia said. 'They assassinated him. Murdered him!' He was holding his cigar down by his side. Chucho stared at him with a face of hate.

'They killed him, Garcia? What are you telling me? What do you mean?' Angel asked him. His hand was still tightly clamped on the sword handle. Out in the ring, Mariano was placing the last pair of banderillas before the quiet crowd.

'They have assassinated him!' Garcia said in the voice that was growing tight and a little high. 'They have assassinated him. They murdered him! They murdered him, do you understand? His own troops, hombre!'

'His own troops? Heh? I don't understand.'

'His own troops, yes. His own men!' Garcia's mouth said. His eyes were saying, 'See? You see, now? You wanted to fight for the people. You wanted to help these people. You're not interested in money. No! Only in helping people. The people! Risk your valuable guts for these brave people. You wanted to

get into the fight, too! Like Pedro! Now, they thank you. They're giving thanks. This is their way! They kill Pedro. They sit on their hands for you.

'Don't go to Mexico with me and make a lot of money for us. Don't do that! No! Risk your bloody belly here. For nothing! Absolutely nothing! Go out, now, and risk your guts some more. Go out! Let them thank you real well!'

Angel stared at him. 'Angel,' Chucho said, and then, 'Chief!' when Angel did not turn to answer him.

'Angel, it is explained. It can be explained,' the sword-handler said. 'I know about it!' Angel turned his eyes slowly to him.

'Yes, it is explained!' Garcia said. 'It is explained, all right! Everything is explained here when it is done.'

'Pedro sold out!' Chucho said to Angel. 'He told the men before the trap was pulled. He wouldn't go through with it. He saved the men, but he asked to be shot. He wanted to stay a man, he said. I knew all about it, but I did not want to tell you yet. This one was happy to tell you. He doesn't preoccupy himself with you any more.'

'You're right,' Garcia said. 'You have reason, sword-handler! He's well taken care of now by the people; his friends, the people.'

Angel's hand was relaxing on the sword. Chucho saw this and neatly and quickly pulled down the brown cover from the blade, and the blade was left bare. When Angel felt the cover come off, he lifted the sword up instinctively and over the fence. He was still staring at the box wall in back of Garcia and Chucho. His face held that set, stupid stare of the shock that will not go away.

Do something, Garcia was thinking. Do something! Do something hysterical or desperate.

Chucho held up the muleta to Angel. Angel took it. He held it by the small stick handle and let the red cloth flow down. He turned around and looked out at the ring. Move, something said to him. Move! You have to move, now.

After the placing of the last banderillas, the people had turned naturally to look for the matador. Now, they watched Conquistador start out from the barrera with the sword and muleta hanging

loosely in his hands, and Salvador Varona, who ten days ago had run fifteen blocks along a street that was being shelled at sixty second intervals with his youngest daughter bleeding to death in his arms, kept looking at him and watching him, and then could not keep silent any longer, and turned to his neighbour to tell him, 'He's yellow! That's a great bull, but he's yellow. The guy's yellow! They're always yellow at the wrong time.'

'Heh?' said the neighbour. 'Heh? Yellow?' He looked at Varona. 'I don't know. I don't know, hombre.' He shook his head a little and then looked back to Angel.

Angel was walking slowly toward the bull. His hands on the sword and muleta tightened their grips as he came near to the terrain of Oficial. The great black bull was waiting quietly for him in front of section seven. His eyes watched that brightly coloured figure come nearer.

The eyes of all that quiet people, too, were on him closely now as he went near. No one had seen that he did not salute the campesinos. No one had cared. This crowd, that had been as quiet as repressed visitors in a strange parlour all during the afternoon, began to feel now as the quiet, embarrassed visitors feel when someone who is not strange to them is coming in, and their tight repressions begin to flow away. They were being able to feel, now, and to laugh or cry and be interested in a thing. The one they knew, the familiar thing coming in now, was death. This was the old 'friend' death. The great bull had death in his strength, in his bravery and his straight charging, and the man had the look of death as he walked slowly and a little unsteadily toward Oficial.

He seemed far away as he stopped a few feet from the bull. They seemed to be seeing him now for the first time. Then, he began to come close. They saw him hold the muleta out from his chest with the red cloth flowing down. He held the sword ribbed across it to broaden it out. He faced the bull slightly from the side and flicked the end of the cloth at him. This was the introduction coming, the pass of death.

Conquistador flicked the end of the cloth again at Oficial. He

charged! Oficial came swooshing into him, and then he raised the muleta and sword up slowly as he hit, and the bull's head was drawn up with the broad red screen, the horn point just brushing the man's chest. Angel's feet had been held tightly together and flat on the ground.

Oficial turned quickly and faced the man again. Angel stood on the same spot with his right side to the bull. He swung the still unfurled muleta out from his right hip, watching the bull's eye as it looked at the shifting cloth. Then, Oficial came on and Conquistador lifted the muleta up past his belly, with the horn sweeping by. Close! That was one good pase! 'Ole!' a man yelled behind him. 'Ole!'

Angel was thinking, he isn't dead. He can't be dead. He's just fooling me. Garcia is just fooling me. He's mad because I'm fighting here. Chucho didn't want to call him a liar, of course. And Pedro isn't really dead!—Angel, Conqueror, was now swinging the cloth out from his left hip, brushing the muleta past the hip to show the bull that something was there, and then swinging it out slowly. The bull charged and the thin, unpeasant-like wrist lifted the muleta up and away to lead the bull back across his chest. Closely again! Again someone called out 'Ole!' and then there were others who shouted it.

He did not hear them. He had been doing all of these things without thinking of them. Instinctively! He was a great and honest bullfighter and he had done them bravely and well. Now, when the bull turned suddenly to face him, he felt himself. He came to the reality of that minute.

(Who in Madrid has not felt death come close? Who has not had him in the parlour? Met him on the street? Who? You? You're not a Madrilenio, then. You must come from the provinces. We all know him here. We know him well. Death? Sure!)

The bull watched him. He held the sword down along the muleta cloth, and began to step quietly away from the bull as he moved the cloth away and up from his hip. He held it further back and then, as the bull charged, the tip of the horn skimmed his body and the bull came close to him with the banderillas

clacking under his face; a real bull, that. Smelling of possible pain. And then he knew, suddenly, that his brother was dead.

'Ole!' It was a shout from many voices now. Pedro!

He dropped to his knees and held the screened muleta out in front of his body. He flicked it at the bull. Official lowered his head and charged. The cloth was lifted as his head went into it and he went under the torero's arms.

Pedro! Pedro! Brother! Older brother! Friend!

He watched the bull turn and face him again. He held his position and flopped the muleta from the other side at the bull. Behind him in a box, a man stood up and said, 'No! No!' Others behind him stood up. They began to call out, 'No!' and then to shout it. 'No! No!' That was too dangerous. 'No!'

Angel stayed kneeling and provoked the charge. The bull came on and the cloth lifted his head up and past the torero's body. The point of the horn brushed his chest and ripped pieces of ornament from his jacket. The crowd jumped up.

Angel stood up slowly. He held his leg out against the cloth of the muleta and toward the bull. He began to move back with the leg held out like that to show the bull there was something to charge at. He moved the bull out to the centre of the ring in quick slides. The crowd settled back slowly. There was some applause.

Juan Negreira stayed at the edge of his seat in the front row above the boxes, and faced the bull with Angel. Juan Negreira, the aficionado, that is, the lover of the bullfight, was attending his last bullfight. Four days ago a shell had hit his apartment, killing his wife and two children instantly. Now, Juan Negreira watched this for the last time.

It was a simple thing that he planned to do. He would walk on the streets of his beloved Madrid during a shelling. He was going to walk along these streets as they did. These were the streets that he connected all happiness with. Now, he would wait for death here.

He gripped his hands and watched Angel pass the bull across his belly. This was the *pase natural* he knew so well. The man held the muleta with his right hand and drew the bull across. He

held the sword away from him with the other hand. Now, Angel shifted the muleta to the left hand and drew the bull from the right. He made two magnificent passes from the right and then shifted the muleta again and drew the bull close to him from the other side. Each time the bull came closer. Once, Negreira saw the horn go past the belly only an inch away. He bent forward with the crowd that had come close again.

Then, they watched as Angel held the cloth up flat to his chest and swung slowly around between the points of the horns. Like a ballet dancer before a fire, Juan Negreira thought. Why do we all want death?

The bull charged at the slowly moving end of the cloth, and they went around in a slow, beautiful molinete. Juan Negreira smiled sadly.

Angel moved back and went to his knees. He held the muleta out from his chest with the sword screening it. The bull was five feet away. Angel flopped the cloth and Official came on. He was very close. He turned quickly and Angel held to his knees and took him across from the right. The ornaments jangled.

Official turned quickly again. Angel stayed. He flopped the muleta slowly. He was drawing him again. For the third time? No bullfighter ever drew a bull three times from his knees.

The people stood. Some young voice called out, 'No, Comrade! No!'

'Aaaarreh,' said Angel to the bull. 'Toro! Tom' aqui! Tom' aqui! Toro! This time! This time you get me! This time you kill me! Come on! Toro!' The bull charged down and the horn came in and ripped at the shirt. Angel stood up slowly as the bull turned and stopped. There was no sound around him. He waited for the blood to pour out. Now! Now, it was done. He felt along his chest slowly with his hand but felt nothing. No blood.

Official was watching him. He held the muleta and drew him again mechanically. The bull came across his legs in a low natural. He was not dying yet. He had remembered to lower the bull's head. This was to tire his neck. He drew him again from the right and pulled him low. There was no pain.

Angel stood up straight and took a deep breath as he drew Oficial across his chest in a *pase de pecho*. He lifted the cloth suddenly at the end and the bull's head went up with it. He drew him from right and left, and then Oficial turned and faced him with his head down and all four feet flat.

Angel put his feet together and lowered the furred muleta in his left hand. One more try! There was one more chance for Oficial to fix him. He flicked the lowered muleta and saw the bull's eyes watching it. Then, Angel lifted himself up slowly to his toes and held the sword up and out from his shoulder. He sighted along it from his side to a spot between the bull's shoulder blades. That was the path to the great heart.

'Come on,' he said. 'Now, you do it.'

'Come on,' said Juan Negreira. 'Go in clean, Angel.'

Angel went higher on his toes. He flicked the cloth's end quickly. Then, as Oficial charged, he seemed to fall forward on to the horns with his chest bared to their points. The sword found the spot truly and was plunged into the hilt as the great charging blackness followed the muleta crossing to the right with the other hand. The bull was pulled under the man, and the crowd came up with the out-go of their breaths as the man jumped lightly back from the bull, his shirt front still white and unbroken.

Angel stood watching as Oficial straightened proudly up for a short minute and then went slowly down on to his knees. The sword hilt showed on the great black, muscle hump. Angel let his knees bend a little as the bull fell. Then Oficial toppled suddenly over and his four feet went out into the air. He was dead.

Behind the torero, the people were coming down from the stands and out on to the sands. They made the noise of a quiet crowd. They came around him. He looked at some of the faces blankly. They seemed to be bright with hope. He could not understand. Then, someone suddenly took his arm and began to move him away. Around him, the crowd lived their applause. He turned to see who was leading him and saw Chucho.

'Chucho, I can't die,' he said.

'No, jefe, don't die.'

'I didn't want to die.'

'No, no! We need everybody.'

'I don't want to go away, either, Chucho!'

They were moving through the people. Chucho shook his head to say no.

'We stay,' Angel said. 'We stay!'

'We stay,' Chucho said.

The Downward Path to Wisdom

BY KATHERINE ANNE PORTER

(From *Harper's Bazaar*, New York)

IN the square bedroom with the big window Mama and Papa lolling back on their pillows were handing each other things from the wide black tray on the small table with crossed legs. They were smiling and they smiled even more when the little boy, with the feeling of sleep still in his skin and hair, came in and walked up to the bed. Leaning against it, his bare toes wriggling in the white fur rug, he went on eating peanuts, which he took from his pyjama pocket. He was four years old.

'Here's my baby,' said Mama. 'Lift him up, will you?'

He went limp as a rag for Papa to take him under the arms and swing him up over a broad tough chest. He sank between his parents like a bear cub in a warm litter, and lay there comfortably. He took another peanut between his teeth, cracked the shell, picked out the nut whole, and ate it.

'Running around without his slippers again,' said Mama. 'His feet are like icicles.'

'He crunches like a horse,' said Papa. 'Eating peanuts before breakfast will ruin his stomach. Where did he get them?'

'You brought them yesterday,' said Mama, with exact memory, 'in a grisly little cellophane sack. I have asked you dozens of times not to bring him things to eat. Put him out, will you? He's spilling shells all over me.'

Almost at once the little boy found himself on the floor again. He moved around to Mama's side of the bed and leaned confidently near her and began another peanut. As he chewed he gazed solemnly in her eyes.

'Bright-looking specimen, isn't he?' asked Papa, stretching his long legs and reaching for his bathrobe. 'I suppose you'll say it's my fault he's dumb as an ox.'

'He's my little baby, my only baby,' said Mama richly, hugging him, 'and he's a dear lamb.' His neck and shoulders were quite boneless in her firm embrace. He stopped chewing long enough to receive a kiss on his crumby chin. 'He's sweet as clover,' said Mama. The baby went on chewing.

'Look at him staring like an owl,' said Papa.

Mama said, 'He's an angel and I'll never get used to having him.'

'We'd be better off if we never *had* had him,' said Papa. He was walking about the room and his back was turned when he said that. There was silence for a moment. The little boy stopped eating, and stared deeply at his Mama. She was looking at the back of Papa's head, and her eyes were almost black. 'You're going to say that just once too often,' she told him in a low voice. 'I hate you when you say that.'

Papa said, 'You spoil him to death. You never correct him for anything. And you don't take care of him. You let him run around eating peanuts before breakfast.'

'You gave him the peanuts, remember that,' said Mama. She sat up and hugged her only baby once more. He nuzzled softly in the pit of her arm. 'Run along, my darling,' she told him, in her gentlest voice, smiling at him straight in the eyes. 'Run along,' she said, her arms falling away from him. 'Get your breakfast.'

The little boy had to pass his father on the way to the door. He shrank into himself when he saw the big hand raised above him. 'Yes, get out of here and stay out,' said Papa, giving him a little shove toward the door. It was not a hard shove, but it hurt the little boy. He slunk out, and trotted down the hall trying not to look back. He was afraid something was coming after him, he could not imagine what. Something hurt him all over, he did not know why.

He did not want his breakfast, he would not have it. He sat and stirred it round in the yellow bowl, letting it stream off the spoon and spill on the table, on his front, on the chair. He liked seeing it spill. It was hateful stuff, but it looked funny running in white rivulets down his pyjamas.

'Now look what you're doing, dirty boy,' said Marjory. 'You dirty little old boy.'

The little boy opened his mouth to speak for the first time. 'You're dirty yourself,' he told her.

'That's right,' said Marjory, leaning over him and speaking so her voice would not carry. 'That's right, just like your Papa. Mean,' she whispered, 'mean.'

The little boy took up his yellow bowl full of cream and oatmeal and sugar with both hands and brought it down with a crash on the table. It burst and some of the wreck lay in chunks and some of it ran all over everything. He felt better.

'You see?' said Marjory, dragging him out of the chair and scrubbing him with a napkin. She scrubbed him as roughly as she dared until he cried out. 'That's just what I said. That's exactly it.' Through his tears he saw her face terribly near, red and frowning under a stiff white band, looking like the face of somebody who came at night and stood over him and scolded him when he could not move or get away. 'Just like your Papa, *mean*.'

The little boy went out into the garden and sat on a green bench dangling his legs. He was clean. His hair was wet and his blue woolly pull-over made his nose itch. His face felt stiff from the soap. He saw Marjory going past a window with the black tray. The curtains were still closed at the window he knew opened into Mama's room. Papa's room. Mommanpoppasroom, the word was pleasant, it made a mumbling, snapping noise between his lips; it ran in his mind while his eyes wandered about looking for something to do, something to play with.

Mommanpoppas' voices kept attracting his attention. Mama was being cross with Papa again. He could tell by the sound. That was what Marjory always said when their voices rose and fell and shot up to a point and crashed and rolled like the two tomcats who fought at night. Papa was being cross, too, much crosser than Mama this time. He grew cold and disturbed and sat very still, wanting to go to the bathroom, but it was just next to Mommanpoppasroom, he didn't dare think of it. As the voices grew louder he could hardly hear them any more, he wanted

so badly to go to the bathroom. 'The kitchen door opened suddenly and Marjory ran out making the motion with her hand that meant he was to come to her. He didn't move. She came to him, her face still red and frowning, but she was not angry; she was scared just as he was. She said, 'Come on, Honey, we've got to go to your gran'ma's again.' She took his hand and pulled him. 'Come on quick, your gran'ma is waiting for you.' He slid off the bench. His mother's voice rose in a terrible scream, screaming something he could not understand, but she was furious, he had seen her clenching her fists and stamping in one spot, screaming with her eyes shut; he knew how she looked. She was screaming in a tantrum, just as he remembered having heard himself. He stood still, doubled over, and all his body seemed to dissolve, sickly, from the pit of his stomach.

'Oh my God,' said Marjory, 'Oh my God. Now look at you. Oh my God. I can't stop to clean you up.'

He did not know how he got to his Grandma's house, but he was there at last, wet and soiled, being handled with disgust in the big bathtub. His grandma was there in long black skirts saying, 'Maybe he's sick, maybe we should send for the doctor.'

'I don't think so, m'am,' said Marjory. 'He hasn't et anything; he's just scared.'

The little boy couldn't raise his eyes, he was so heavy with shame. 'Take this note to his mother,' said Grandma.

She sat in a wide chair and ran her hands over his head, combing his hair with her fingers; she lifted his chin and kissed him. 'Poor little fellow,' she said. 'Never you mind. You always have a good time at your grandma's, don't you? You're going to have a nice little visit, just like the last time.'

The little boy leaned against the stiff, dry-smelling clothes, and felt horribly grieved about something. He began to whimper and said, 'I'm hungry. I want something to eat.' This reminded him. He began to bellow at the top of his voice; he threw himself upon the carpet and rubbed his nose in a dusty woolly bouquet of roses. 'I want my peanuts,' he howled. 'Somebody took my peanuts.'

His grandma knelt beside him, and gathered him up so tightly

he could hardly move. She called in a calm voice above his howls to Old Janet in the doorway, 'Bring me some bread and butter with strawberry jam.'

'I want peanuts,' yelled the little boy, desperately.

'No, you don't, darling,' said his grandma. 'You don't want horrid old peanuts to make you sick. You're going to have some of Grandma's nice fresh bread with good strawberries on it. That's what you're going to have.' He sat afterward very quietly and ate and ate. His grandma sat near him and Old Janet stood by, near a tray with a loaf and a glass bowl of jam upon the table at the window. Outside there was a trellis with tube-shaped red flowers clinging all over it, and brown bees singing.

'I hardly know what to do,' said Grandma, 'it's very —'

'Yes, m'am,' said Old Janet, 'it certainly is —'

Grandma said, 'I can't possibly see the end of it. It's a terrible —'

'It certainly is bad,' said Old Janet, 'all this upset all the time and him such a baby.'

Their voices ran on soothingly. The little boy ate and forgot to listen. He did not know these women, except by name. He could not understand what they were talking about, their hands and their clothes and their voices were dry and far away; they examined him with crinkled eyes without any expression that he could see. He sat there waiting for whatever they would do next with him. He hoped they would let him go out and play in the yard. The room was full of flowers and dark red curtains and big soft chairs, and the windows were open, but it was still dark in there, somehow; dark, and a place he did not know, or trust.

'Now drink your milk,' said Old Janet, holding out a silver cup.

'I don't want any milk,' he said, turning his head away.

'Very well, Janet, he doesn't have to drink it,' said Grandma, quickly: 'Now run out in the garden and play, darling. Janet, get his hoop.'

A big strange man came home in the evenings, who treated the little boy very confusingly. 'Say "please", and "thank you", young

man,' he would roar, terrifyingly, when he gave any smallest object to the little boy. 'Well, fellow, are you ready for a fight?' he would say again, doubling up huge hairy fists and making passes at him. 'Come on now, you must learn to box.' After the first few times this was fun.

'Don't teach him to be rough,' said Grandma. 'Time enough for all that.'

'Now, mother, we don't want him to be a sissy,' said the big man. 'He's got to toughen up early. Come on now, fellow, put up your mitts.' The little boy liked this new word for hands. He learned to throw himself upon the strange big man, whose name was Uncle David, and hit him on the chest as hard as he could; the big man would laugh and hit him back with his huge loose fists. Sometimes, but not often, Uncle David came home in the middle of the day. The little boy missed him on the other days, and would hang on the gate looking down the street for him. One evening he brought a large square package under his arm.

'Come over here, fellow, and see what I've got,' he said, pulling off quantities of green paper and string from the box, which was full of flat, folded colours. He put something in the little boy's hand. It was limp and silky and bright green with a tube on the end. 'Thank you,' said the little boy, nicely, but not knowing what to do with it.

'Balloons,' said Uncle David in triumph. 'Now just put your mouth here and blow hard.' The little boy blew hard and the green thing began to grow round and thin and silvery.

'Good for your chest,' said Uncle David. 'Blow some more.' The little boy went on blowing and the balloon swelled steadily.

'Stop,' said Uncle David, 'that's enough.' He twisted the tube to keep the air in. 'That's the way,' he said. 'Now I'll blow one, and you blow one, and let's see who can blow up a big balloon the fastest.'

They blew and blew, especially Uncle David. He puffed and panted and blew with all his might, but the little boy won. His balloon was perfectly round before Uncle David could even get started. The little boy was so proud he began to dance and shout,

'I beat, I beat,' and blew in his balloon again. It burst in his face and frightened him so he felt sick. 'Ha ha, ho ho ho,' whooped Uncle David. 'That's the boy. I bet I can't do that. Now let's see.' He blew until the beautiful bubble grew and wavered and burst into thin air, and there was only a small coloured rag in his hand. This was a fine game. They went on with it until Grandma came in and said, 'Time for supper, now. No, you can't blow balloons at the table. To-morrow, maybe.' And it was all over.

The next day, instead of being given balloons, he was hustled out of bed early, bathed in warm soapy water, and given a big breakfast of soft-boiled eggs with toast and jam and milk. His grandma came in to kiss him good morning. 'And I hope you'll be a good boy and obey your teacher,' she told him.

'What's teacher?' asked the little boy.

'Teacher is at school,' said Grandma. 'She'll tell you all sorts of things and you must do as she says.'

Mama and Papa had talked a great deal about School, and how they must send him there. They had told him it was a fine place with all kinds of toys and other children to play with. He felt he knew about School. 'I didn't know it was time, Grandma,' he said. 'Is it to-day?'

'It's this very minute,' said Grandma. 'I told you a week ago.'

Old Janet came in with her bonnet on. It was a prickly-looking bundle held with a black rubber band under her back hair. 'Come on,' she said. 'This is my busy day.' She wore a dead cat slung around her neck, its sharp ears bent over and under her baggy chin.

The little boy was excited and wanted to run ahead. 'Hold to my hand like I told you,' said Old Janet. 'Don't go running off like that and get yourself killed.'

'I'm going to get killed, I'm going to get killed,' sang the little boy, making a tune of his own.

'Don't say that, you give me the creeps,' said Old Janet. 'Hold to my hand, now.' She bent over and looked at him, not at his face but at something on his clothes. His eyes followed hers.

'I declare,' said Old Janet, 'I did forget. I was going to sew it

up. I might have known. I *told* your grandma it would be that way from now on.'

'What?' asked the little boy.

'Just look at yourself,' said Old Janet, crossly. He looked at himself. There was a little end of him showing through the slit in his short blue flannel trousers. The trousers came half-way to his knees above, and his socks came half-way to his knees below, and all winter long his knees were cold. He remembered now how cold his knees were in cold weather. And how sometimes he would have to put the part of him that came through the slit back again, because he was cold there, too. He saw at once what was wrong, and tried to arrange himself, but his mittens got in the way. Janet said, 'Stop that, you bad boy', and with a firm thumb she set him in order, at the same time reaching under his belt to pull down and fold his knit undershirt over his front.

'There now,' she said, 'try not to disgrace yourself to-day.' He felt guilty and red all over, because he had something that showed when he was dressed that was not supposed to show then. The different women who bathed him always wrapped him quickly in towels and hurried him into his clothes, because they saw something about him he could not see for himself. They hurried him so he never had a chance to see whatever it was they saw, and though he looked at himself when his clothes were off, he could not find out what was wrong with him. Outside, in his clothes, he knew he looked like everybody else, but inside his clothes there was something bad the matter with him. It worried him and confused him and he wondered about it. The only people who never seemed to notice there was something wrong with him were Mommanpoppa. They never called him a bad boy, and all summer long they had taken all his clothes off and let him run in the sand beside a big ocean.

'Look at him, isn't he a love?' Mama would say, and Papa would look, and say, 'He's got a back like a prize fighter.' Uncle David was a prize fighter when he doubled up his mitts and said, 'Come on, fellow.'

Old Janet held him firmly and took long steps under her big

rustling skirts. He did not like Old Janet's smell. It made him a little quivery in the stomach; it was just like wet chicken feathers.

School was easy. Teacher was a square-shaped woman with square short hair and short skirts. She got in the way sometimes, but not often. The people around him were his size; he didn't have always to be stretching his neck up to faces bent over him, and he could sit on the chairs without having to climb. All the children had names, like Frances and Evelyn and Agatha and Edward and Martin, and his own name was Stephen. He was not Mama's 'Baby', nor Papa's 'Old Man'; he was not Uncle David's 'Fellow' or Grandma's 'Darling', or even Old Janet's 'Bad Boy'. He was Stephen. He was learning to read, and to sing a tune to some strange-looking letters or marks written in chalk on a blackboard. You talked one kind of lettering, and you sang another. All the children talked and sang in turn, and then all together. Stephen thought it a fine game. He felt awake and happy. They had soft clay and paper and wires and squares of colours in tin boxes to play with, coloured blocks to build houses with. Afterwards they all danced in a big ring, and then they danced in pairs, boys with girls. Stephen danced with Frances, and Frances kept saying, 'Now you just follow me.' She was a little taller than he was, and her hair stood up in short shiny curls, the colour of an ashtray on Papa's desk. She would say, 'You can't dance.' 'I can dance, too,' said Stephen, jumping around holding her hands, 'I can, too, dance.' He was certain of it. '*You* can't dance,' he told Frances, 'you can't dance at all.'

Then they had to change partners, and when they came round again, Frances said, 'I don't *like* the way you dance.' This was different. He felt uneasy about it. He didn't jump quite so high when the phonograph record started going dumdididly dumdididly again. 'Go ahead, Stephen, you're doing fine,' said Teacher, waving her hands together very fast. The dance ended, and they all played 'relaxing' for five minutes. They relaxed by swinging their arms back and forth, then rolling their heads round and round. When Old Janet came for him he didn't want to go home. At lunch his grandma told him twice to keep his face out of his

plate. 'Is that what they teach you at school?' she asked. Uncle David was at home. 'Here you are, fellow,' he said, and gave Stephen two balloons. 'Thank you,' said Stephen. He put the balloons in his pocket and forgot about them. 'I told you that boy could learn something,' said Uncle David to Grandma. 'Hear him say "thank you?"'

In the afternoon at school Teacher handed out big wads of clay and told the children to make something out of it. Anything they liked. Stephen decided to make a cat, like Mama's Meeow at home. He did not like Meeow, but he thought it would be easy to make a cat. He could not get the clay to work at all. It simply fell into one lump after another. So he stopped, wiped his hands on his pull-over, remembered his balloons, and began blowing one.

'Look at Stephen's horse,' said Frances. 'Just look at it.'

'It's not a horse, it's a cat,' said Stephen. The other children gathered around. 'It looks like a horse, a little,' said Martin.

'It is a cat,' said Stephen stamping his foot, feeling his face turning hot. The other children all laughed and exclaimed over Stephen's cat that looked like a horse. Teacher came down among them. She sat usually at the top of the room before a big table covered with papers and playthings. She picked up Stephen's lump of clay and turned it round and examined it with her kind eyes. 'Now children,' she said, 'everybody has the right to make anything the way he pleases. If Stephen says this is a cat, it *is* a cat. Maybe you were thinking about a horse, Stephen?'

'It's a *cat*,' said Stephen. He was aching all over. He knew then he should have said at first 'Yes, it's a horse.' Then they would have let him alone. They would never have known he was trying to make a cat. 'It's Meeow,' he said, in a trembling voice, 'but I forgot how she looks.'

His balloon was perfectly flat. He started blowing it up again, trying not to cry. Then it was time to go home, and Old Janet came looking for him. While Teacher was talking to other grown-up people who came to take other children home, Frances said, 'Give me your balloon, I haven't got a balloon.' Stephen handed

it to her. He was happy to give it. He reached in his pocket and took out the other. Happily, he gave her that one, too. Frances took it, then handed it back. 'Now you blow up one and I'll blow up the other, and let's have a race,' she said. When their balloons were only half filled, Old Janet took Stephen by the arm and said, 'Come on here, this is my busy day.'

Frances ran after them, calling, 'Stephen, you give me back my balloon,' and snatched it away. Stephen did not know whether he was surprised to find himself going away with Frances's balloon, or whether he was surprised to see her snatching it as if it really belonged to her. He was badly mixed up in his mind, and Old Janet was hauling him along. One thing he knew, he liked Frances, he was going to see her again to-morrow, and he was going to bring her more balloons.

That evening Stephen boxed a while with his Uncle David, and Uncle David gave him a beautiful orange. 'Eat that,' he said, 'it's good for your health.'

'Uncle David, may I have some more balloons?' asked Stephen.

'Well, what do you say first?' asked Uncle David, reaching for the box on the top bookshelf.

'Please,' said Stephen.

'That's the word,' said Uncle David. He brought out two balloons, a red and a yellow one. Stephen noticed for the first time they had letters on them, very small letters that grew taller and wider as the balloon grew rounder. 'Now that's all, fellow,' said Uncle David. 'Don't ask for any more, because that's all.' He put the box back on the bookshelf, but not before Stephen had seen that the box was almost full of balloons. He didn't say a word, but went on blowing, and Uncle David blew also. Stephen thought it was the nicest game he had ever known.

He had only one left, the next day, but he took it to school and gave it to Frances. 'There are a lot,' he said, feeling very proud and warm, 'I'll bring you a lot of them.'

Frances blew it up until it made a beautiful bubble, and said, 'Look, I want to show you something.' She took a sharp pointed

stick they used in working the clay, she poked the balloon, and it exploded. 'Look at that,' she said.

'That's nothing,' said Stephen, 'I'll bring you some more.'

After school, before Uncle David came home, while Grandma was resting, when Old Janet had given him his milk and told him to run away and not bother her, Stephen dragged a chair to the bookshelf, stood upon it, and reached into the box. He did not take three or four as he believed he intended; once his hands were upon them he seized what they could hold and jumped off the chair, hugging them to him. He stuffed them into his reefer pocket, where they folded down and hardly made a lump.

He gave them all to Frances. There were so many, Frances gave most of them away to the other children. Stephen, flushed with his new joy, the lavish pleasure of giving presents, found almost at once still another happiness. Suddenly he was popular among the children; they invited him specially to join whatever games were up, they fell in at once with his own notions for play, and asked him what he would like to do next. They had festivals of blowing up the beautiful globes, fuller and rounder and thinner, changing as they went from deep colour to lighter, paler tones, growing glassy thin, bubbly thin, then bursting with a thrilling loud noise like a toy pistol.

For the first time in his life, Stephen had almost too much of something he wanted, and his head was so turned he forgot how this fullness came about, and no longer thought of it as a secret. The next day was Saturday, and Frances came to visit him, with her nurse. The nurse and Old Janet sat in Old Janet's room drinking coffee and gossiping, and the children sat on the side porch, blowing balloons. Stephen chose an apple-coloured one and Frances a pale green one. Between them on the bench lay a tumbled heap of delights still to come.

'I once had a silver balloon,' said Frances, 'a beyootiful silver one, not round like these, it was a long one. But these are even nicer I think,' she added quickly, for she did want to be polite.

'When you get through with that one,' said Stephen, gazing

at her with the pure bliss of giving added to loving, 'You can blow up a blue one and then a pink one and a yellow one and a purple one.' He pushed the heap of limp objects toward her. Her clear-looking eyes, with fine little rays of brown in them like the spokes of a wheel, were full of approval for Stephen. 'I wouldn't want to be greedy, though, and blow up all your balloons.'

'There'll be plenty more left,' said Stephen, and his heart rose under his thin ribs. He felt his ribs with his fingers and discovered with some surprise that they stopped somewhere in front, while Frances sat blowing balloons rather half-heartedly. The truth was, she was tired of balloons. After you blow six or seven, your chest gets hollow and your lips feel puckery. She had been blowing balloons steadily for three days now. She had begun to hope they were giving out. 'There's boxes and boxes more of them, Frances,' said Stephen, happily. 'Millions more. I guess they'd last and last if we didn't blow too many every day.'

Frances said, somewhat timidly, 'I tell you what. Let's rest a while and fix some liquish water. Do you like liquish?'

'Yes, I do,' said Stephen, 'but I haven't got any.'

'Couldn't we buy some?' asked Frances, 'it's only a cent a stick, the nice rubbery, twisty kind. We can put it in a bottle with some water, and shake it and shake it, and it makes foam on top like soda pop and we can drink it. I'm kind of thirsty,' she said in a small weak voice, 'blowing balloons all the time makes you thirsty, I think.'

Stephen, in silence, realized a dreadful truth and a numb feeling crept over him. He did not have a cent to buy liquorice for Frances and she was tired of his balloons. This was the first real dismay of his whole life, and he aged at least a year in the next minute, huddled, with his deep serious blue eyes focused down his nose in intense speculation. What could he do to please Frances that would not cost money? Only yesterday Uncle David had given him a nickel, and he had thrown it away on gumdrops. He regretted that nickel so bitterly his neck and forehead were damp. He was thirsty, too.

'I tell you what,' he said, brightening with a splendid idea,

lameley trailing off on second thought, 'I know something we can do, I'll — I —'

'I *am* thirsty,' said Frances, with gentle persistence. 'I think I'm so thirsty maybe I'll have to go home.' She did not leave the bench, though, but sat, turning her grieved mouth toward Stephen.

Stephen quivered with the terrors of the adventure before him, but he said boldly, 'I'll make some lemonade. I'll get sugar and lemon and some ice and we'll have lemonade.'

'Oh, I love lemonade,' cried Frances. 'I'd rather have lemonade than liquish.'

'You stay right here,' said Stephen, 'and I'll get everything.'

He ran around the house, and under Old Janet's window he heard the dry chattering voices of the two old women whom he must outwit. He sneaked on tiptoe to the pantry, took a lemon lying there by itself, a handful of lump sugar, and a china teapot, smooth, round, with flowers and leaves all over it. These he left on the kitchen table while he broke a piece of ice with a sharp metal pick he had been forbidden to touch. He put the ice in the pot, cut the lemon, and squeezed it as well as he could — a lemon was tougher and more slippery than he had thought — and mixed sugar and water. He decided there was not enough sugar, so he sneaked back and took another handful. He was back on the porch in an astonishingly short time, his face tight, his knees trembling, carrying iced lemonade to thirsty Frances with both his devoted hands. A pace distant from her, he stopped, literally stabbed through with a thought. Here he stood in broad daylight carrying a teapot with lemonade in it, and his grandma or Old Janet might walk through the door at any moment.

'Come on, Frances,' he whispered loudly. 'Let's go round to the back behind the rosebushes where it's shady.' Frances leaped up and ran like a deer beside him, her face wise with knowledge of why they ran; Stephen ran stiffly, cherishing his teapot with clenched hands.

It was shady behind the rose bushes, and much safer. They sat side by side on the dampish ground, legs doubled under, drinking

in turn from the slender spout. Stephen took his just share in large cool delicious swallows. When Frances drank, she set her round pink mouth daintily to the spout and her throat beat steadily as a heart. Stephen was thinking he had really done something pretty nice for Frances. He did not know where his own happiness was, it was mixed with the sweet-sour taste in his mouth and a cool feeling in his bosom because Frances was there, drinking his lemonade, which he had got for her with great danger.

Frances said, 'My, what big swallows you take,' when his turn came next.

'No bigger than yours,' he told her, downrightly. 'You take awfully big swallows.'

'Well,' said Frances, turning this criticism into an argument for her rightness about things, 'that's the way to drink lemonade, anyway.' She peered into the teapot. There was quite a lot of lemonade left and she was beginning to feel she had enough. 'Let's make up a game and see who can take the biggest swallows.'

This was such a wonderful notion they grew reckless, tipping the spout into their opened mouths above their heads until lemonade welled up and ran over their chins in rills down their fronts. When they tired of this, there was still lemonade left in the pot. They played first at giving the rosebush a drink and ended by baptizing it. 'Name father son holygoat,' shouted Stephen, pouring. At this sound, Old Janet's face appeared over the low hedge, with the tan, disgusted-looking face of Frances's nurse hanging over her shoulder.

'Well, just as I thought,' said Old Janet. 'Just as I expected.' The bag under her chin waggled.

'We were thirsty,' he said, 'we were awfully thirsty.' Frances said nothing, but she gazed steadily at the toes of her shoes.

'Give me that teapot,' said Old Janet, taking it with a rude snatch. 'Just because you're thirsty is no reason,' said Old Janet. 'You can ask for things. You don't have to steal.'

'We didn't steal,' cried Frances suddenly. 'We didn't. We didn't!'

'That's enough from you, Missy,' said her nurse. 'Come straight out of there. You have nothing to do with this.'

'Oh, I don't know,' said Old Janet, with a hard stare at Frances's nurse. 'He never did such a thing before, by himself.'

'Come on,' said the nurse to Frances, 'this is no place for you.' She held Frances by the wrist and started walking away so fast Frances had to run to keep up. 'Nobody can call *us* thieves and get away with it.'

'You don't have to steal, even if others do,' said Old Janet to Stephen, in a high carrying voice. 'If you so much as pick up a lemon in somebody else's house, you're a little thief.' She lowered her voice then, and said, 'Now I'm going to tell your grandma and you'll see what you get.'

'He went in the icebox and left it open,' Janet told Grandma, 'and he got into the lump sugar and spilt it all over the floor. Lumps everywhere underfoot. He dribbled water all over the clean kitchen floor, and he baptized the rosebush, blaspheming. And he took your Spode teapot.'

'I didn't, either,' said Stephen, loudly, trying to free his hand from Old Janet's big hard fist.

'Don't tell fibs,' said Old Janet, 'that's the last straw.'

'Oh, dear,' said Grandma. 'He's not a baby any more.' She shut the book she was reading and pulled the wet front of his pull-over toward her. 'What's this sticky stuff on him?' she asked and straightened her glasses.

'Lemonade,' said Old Janet. 'He took the last lemon.'

They were in the big dark room with the red curtains. Uncle David walked in from the room with the bookcases, holding a box in his uplifted hand. 'Look here,' he said to Stephen. 'What's become of all my balloons?'

Stephen knew well that Uncle David was not really asking a question.

Stephen, sitting on a footstool at his grandma's knee, felt sleepy. He leaned heavily and wished he could put his head on her lap, but he might go to sleep, and it would be wrong to go to sleep

while Uncle David was still talking. Uncle David walked about the room with his hands in his pockets, talking to Grandma. Now and then he would walk over to a lamp and leaning, peer into the top of the shade, winking in the light, as if he expected to find something there.

'It's simply in the blood, I told her,' said Uncle David. 'I told her she would simply have to come and get him, and keep him. She asked me if I meant to call him a thief and I said if she could think of a more exact word I'd be glad to hear it.'

'You shouldn't have said that,' commented Grandma, calmly.

'Why not? She might as well know the facts . . . I suppose he can't help it,' said Uncle David, stopping now in front of Stephen and dropping his chin into his collar, 'I shouldn't expect too much of him, but you can't begin too early —'

'The trouble is,' said Grandma, and while she spoke, she took Stephen by the chin and held it up so that he had to meet her eye; she talked steadily in a mournful tone, but Stephen could not understand. She ended. 'It's not just about the balloons, of course.'

'It is about the balloons,' said Uncle David, angrily, 'because balloons now mean something worse later. But what can you expect? His father — well, it's in the blood. He —'

'That's your sister's husband you're talking about,' said Grandma, 'and there is no use making things worse. Besides, you don't really *know*.'

'I *do* know,' said Uncle David. And he talked again very fast, walking up and down. Stephen tried to understand, but the sounds were strange and floating just over his head. They were talking about his father, and they did not like him. Uncle David came over and stood above Stephen and Grandma. He hunched over them with a frowning face, a long, crooked shadow from him falling across them to the wall. To Stephen, he looked like his father, and he shrank against his grandma's skirts.

'The question is, what to do with him now?' asked Uncle David. 'If we keep him here, he'd just be a —. I won't be bothered with him. Why can't they take care of their own child? That house is crazy. Too far gone already, I'm afraid. No training. No example.'

'You're right, they must take him and keep him,' said Grandma. She ran her hands over Stephen's head, tenderly she pinched the nape of his neck between thumb and forefinger. 'You're your Grandma's darling,' she told him, 'and you've had a nice long visit, and now you're going home. Mama is coming for you in a few minutes. Won't that be nice?'

'I want my Mama,' said Stephen, whimpering, for his grandma's face frightened him. There was something wrong with her smile.

Uncle David sat down. 'Come over here, fellow,' he said, wagging a forefinger at Stephen. Stephen went over slowly, and Uncle David drew him between his wide knees in their loose rough clothes. 'You ought to be ashamed of yourself,' he said, 'stealing Uncle David's balloons when he had already given you so many.'

'It wasn't that,' said Grandma quickly. 'Don't say that. It will make an impression —'

'I hope it does,' said Uncle David, in a louder voice, 'I hope he remembers it all his life. If he belonged to me I'd give him a good thrashing.'

Stephen felt his mouth, his chin, his whole face jerking. He opened his mouth to take a breath, and tears and noise burst from him. 'Stop that, fellow, stop that,' said Uncle David, shaking him gently by the shoulders, but Stephen could not stop. He drew his breath again and it came back in a howl. Old Janet came to the door.

'Bring me some cold water,' called Grandma. There was a flurry, a commotion, a breath of cool air from the hall, the door slammed, and Stephen heard his mother's voice. His howl died away, his breath sobbed and fluttered, he turned his dimmed eyes and saw her standing there. His heart turned over within him and he bleated like a lamb, 'Maaaaama,' running toward her. Uncle David stood back as Mama swooped in and fell on her knees beside Stephen. She gathered him to her and stood up with him in her arms.

'What are you doing to my baby?' she asked Uncle David in a thickened voice. 'I should never have let him come here. I should have known better —'

'You always should know better,' said Uncle David, 'and you never do. And you never will. You haven't got it here,' he told her, tapping his forehead.

'David,' said Grandma, 'that's your —'

'Yes, I know, she's my sister,' said Uncle David. 'I know it. But if she must run away and marry a —'

'Shut up,' said Mama.

'And bring more like him into the world, let her keep them at home. I say let her keep —'

Mama set Stephen on the floor, and holding him by the hand, she said to Grandma all in a rush as if she were reading something, 'Good-bye, mother. This is the last time, really the last. I can't bear it any longer. Say good-bye to Stephen, you'll never see him again. You let this happen. It's your fault. You know David was a coward and a bully and a self-righteous little beast all his life and you never crossed him in anything. You let him bully me all my life and you let him slander my husband and call my baby a thief, and now this is the end . . . He calls my baby a thief over a few horrible little balloons because he doesn't like my husband —'

She was panting and staring about from one to the other. They were all standing. Now Grandma said: 'Go home, daughter. Go away, David. I'm sick of your quarrelling. I've never had a day's peace or comfort from either of you. I'm sick of you both. Now let me alone and stop this noise. Go away,' said Grandma, in a wavering voice. She took out her handkerchief and wiped first one eye and then the other, and said, 'All this hate, hate — what is it for? . . . So this is the way it turns out. Well, let me alone.'

'You and your little advertising balloons,' said Mama to Uncle David, 'the big honest businessman advertises with balloons and if he loses one he'll be ruined. And your beastly little moral notions —'

Grandma went to the door to meet Old Janet, who handed her a glass of water. Grandma drank it all, standing there.

'Is your husband coming for you, or are you going home by yourself?' she asked Mama.

'I'm driving myself,' said Mama, in a far-away voice as if her

mind had wandered. 'You know he wouldn't set foot in this house.'

'I should think not,' said Uncle David.

'Come on, Stephen darling,' said Mama. 'It's far past his bedtime,' she said, to no one in particular. 'Imagine keeping a baby up to torture him about a few miserable little bits of coloured rubber.' She smiled at Uncle David with both rows of teeth, as she passed him on the way to the door, keeping between him and Stephen. 'Ah, where would we be without high moral standards?' she said, and then to Grandma, 'Good night, mother,' in quite her usual voice. 'I'll see you in a day or so.'

'Yes, indeed,' said Grandma cheerfully, coming out into the hall with Stephen and Mama. 'Let me hear from you. Ring me up to-morrow. I hope you'll be feeling better.'

'I feel very well now,' said Mama, brightly, laughing. She bent down and kissed Stephen. 'Sleepy, darling? Papa's waiting to see you. Don't go to sleep until you've kissed your Papa good night.'

Stephen woke with a sharp jerk. He raised his head and put out his chin a little. 'I don't want to go home,' he said, 'I want to go to school. I don't want to see Papa, I don't like him.'

Mama laid her palm over his mouth softly. 'Darling, don't.'

Uncle David put his head out with a kind of snort. 'There you are,' he said. 'There you've got a statement from headquarters.'

Mama opened the door and ran, almost carrying Stephen. She ran across the sidewalk, jerking open the car door and dragging Stephen in after her. She spun the car around and dashed forward so sharply Stephen was almost flung out of the seat. He sat braced, then, with all his might, hands digging into the cushions. The car speeded up and the trees and houses whizzed by all flattened out. Stephen began suddenly to sing to himself, a quiet inside song so Mama would not hear. He sang his new secret, it was a comfortable sleepy song: 'I hate Papa, I hate Mama, I hate Grandma, I hate Uncle David, I hate Old Janet, I hate Marjory, I hate Papa, I hate Mama. . . .'

His head bobbed, leaned, came to rest on Mama's knee, eyes closed. Mama drew him closer and slowed down, driving with one hand.

The Presbyterian Choir Singers

BY WILLIAM SAROYAN

(From *Harper's Magazine*)

ONE of the many curious and delightful things about our country is the ease with which our good people move from one religion to another, or from no particular religion at all to any religion that happens to come along, without experiencing any particular loss or gain, and go right on being innocent anyhow.

Myself, I was born, for instance, a kind of Catholic, although I was not baptized until I was thirteen, a circumstance which, I remember clearly, irritated the priest very much and impelled him to ask my people if they were crazy, to which my people replied, We have been away.

Thirteen years old and not baptized! the priest shouted. What kind of people are you?

For the most part, my uncle Melik replied, we are an agricultural people although we have had our brilliant men too.

It was a Saturday afternoon. The whole thing took no more than seven minutes, but even after I was baptized it was impossible for me to feel any change.

Well, my grandmother said, you are now baptized. Do you feel any better?

For some months, I believe I ought to explain, I had been feeling intelligent, which led my grandmother to suspect that I was ill with some mysterious illness or that I was losing my mind.

I think I feel the same, I said.

Do you believe now? she shouted. Or do you still have doubts?

I can easily say I believe, I said, but to tell you the truth I don't know for sure. I want to be a Christian of course.

Well, just believe then, my grandmother said, and go about your business.

My business was in some ways quaint and in other ways incredible.

I sang in the Boys' Choir at the Presbyterian Church on Tulare Street. For doing so I received one dollar a week from an elderly Christian lady named Balaifal who lived in sorrow and solitude in the small ivy-covered house next to the house in which my friend Pandro Kolkhozian lived.

This boy, like myself, was loud in speech. That is to say, we swore a good deal — in all innocence of course — and by doing so grieved Miss or Mrs. Balaifal so much that she sought to save us while there was still time. To be saved was a thing I for one had no occasion to resent.

Miss Balaifal (I shall call her that from now on, since while I knew her she was certainly single, and since I do not know for sure if she ever married, or for that matter if she ever thought of marrying, or if she ever so much as fell in love — earlier in life of course, and no doubt with a scoundrel who took the whole matter with a grain of salt) — Miss Balaifal, as I began to say, was a cultured woman, a reader of the poems of Robert Browning and other poets and a woman of great sensitivity, so that coming out on the porch of her house to hear us talk she could stand so much and no more, and when the limit had been reached, cried out, Boys, boys. You must not use profane language.

Pandro Kolkhozian, on the one hand, seemed to be the most uncouth boy in the world and on the other — and this was the quality in him which endeared him to me — the most courteous and thoughtful.

Yes, Miss Balaifum, he said.

Balaifal, the lady corrected him. Please come here. Both of you.

We went to Miss Balaifal and asked what she wanted.

What do you want, Miss Balaifum? Pandro said.

Miss Balaifal went into her coat pocket and brought out a sheaf of pamphlets, and without looking at them handed one to each of us. My pamphlet was entitled, *Redemption, The Story of a Drunkard*. Pandro's was entitled, *Peace at Last, The Story of a Drunkard*.

What's this for? Pandro said.

I want you boys to read those pamphlets and try to be good, Miss Balaifal said. I want you to stop using profane language.

It doesn't say anything here about profane language, Pandro said.

There's a good lesson for each of you in those pamphlets, the lady said. Read them and don't use profane language any more.

Yes, ma'am, I said. Is that all?

One thing more, Miss Balaifal said. I wonder if you boys would help me move the organ from the dining-room to the parlour?

Sure, Miss Balaifum, Pandro said. Any time.

So we went into the lady's house and, while she instructed us in just how to do it without damaging the instrument or ourselves, we moved it, by slow degrees, from the dining-room to the parlour.

Now read those pamphlets, Miss Balaifal said.

Yes, ma'am, Pandro said. Is that all?

Well, now, the lady said. I want you to sing while I play the organ.

I can't sing, Miss Balaifum, Pandro said.

Nonsense, the lady said. Of course you can sing, Pedro.

Pandro, not Pedro, Pandro said. Pedro is my cousin's name.

As a matter of fact Pandro's name was Pantalo, which in Armenian means pants. When he had started to school his teacher hadn't cared for, or hadn't liked the sound of, the name, so she had written down on his card Pandro. As for his cousin's name, it was Bedros, with the *b* soft, which in turn had been changed at school to Pedro. It was all quite all right of course, and no harm to anybody.

Without answering him, the elderly lady sat on the stool, adjusted her feet on the pedals of the organ, and without any instructions to us, began to play a song which, from its dullness, was obviously religious. After a moment she herself began to sing. Pandro, in a soft voice, uttered a very profane, if not vulgar word, which fortunately Miss Balaifal did not hear. Miss Balaifal's voice was, if anything, not impressive. The pedals squeaked a

good deal louder than she sang, the tones of the organ were not any too clear, but even so, it was possible to know that Miss Balaifal's voice was not delightful.

Galilee, bright Galilee, she sang.

She turned to us, nodded, and said, Now sing. Sing, boys.

We knew neither the words nor the music, but it seemed that common courtesy demanded at least an honest effort, which we made, trying as far as possible to follow the music coming out of the organ and the dramatic words coming out of Miss Balaifal.

Ruler of the storm was He, on the raging Galilee, she sang.

In all, we tried to sing three songs. After each song, Pandro would say, Thank you very much, Miss Balaifum. Can we go now?

At last she got up from the organ, and said I'm sure you're the better for it. If evil friends invite you to drink, turn away.

We'll turn away, Miss Balaifum, Pandro said. Won't we, Aram?

I will, I said.

I will too, Pandro said. Can we go now, Miss Balaifum?

Read the pamphlets, she said. It's not too late.

We'll read them, Pandro said. Just as soon as we get time.

We left the lady's house and went back to the front yard of Pandro's house and began to read the pamphlets. Before we were half through reading, the lady came out on the porch and in a very high and excited voice said, Which of you was it?

Which was *what*? Pandro said.

He was very bewildered.

Which of you was it that sang? Miss Balaifal said.

We both sang, I said.

No, Miss Balaifal said. Only one of you sang. One of you has a beautiful Christian voice.

Not me, Pandro said.

You, Miss Balaifal said to me. Eugene. Was it you?

Aram, I said. Not Eugene. No, I don't think it was me either.

Boys, come here, Miss Balaifal said.

Who? Pandro said,

Both of you, the lady said.

When we were in the house and Miss Balaifal was seated at the organ again Pandro said, I don't want to sing. I don't like to sing.

You sing, the lady said to me.

I sang.

Miss Balaifal leaped to her feet.

You are the one, she said. You must sing at church.

I won't, I said.

You mustn't use profane language, she said.

I'm not using profane language, I said, and I promise not to use profane language again as long as I live, but I won't sing in church.

Your voice is the most Christian voice I have ever heard, Miss Balaifal said.

It isn't, I said.

Yes, it is, she said.

Well, I won't sing anyway, I said.

You must, you must, Miss Balaifal said.

Thanks very much, Miss Balaifum, Pandro said. Can we go now? He doesn't want to sing in church.

He must, he must, the lady insisted.

Why? Pandro said.

For the good of his soul, the lady said.

Pandro whispered the profane word again.

Now tell me, the lady said. What is your name?

I told her.

You are a Christian, of course? she said.

I guess so, I said.

A Presbyterian of course, she said.

I don't know about that, I said.

You are, the lady said. Of course you are. I want you to sing in the Tulare Street Presbyterian Church — in the Boys' Choir — next Sunday.

Why? Pandro said again.

We need voices, the lady explained. We must have young voices. We must have singers. He must sing next Sunday.

I don't like to sing, I said. I don't like to go to church either. Boys, Miss Balaifal said. Sit down. I want to talk to you.

We sat down. Miss Balaifal talked to us for at least thirty minutes.

We didn't believe a word of it, although out of courtesy we kept answering her questions the way we knew she wanted us to answer them, but when she asked us to get down on our knees with her while she prayed, we wouldn't do it. Miss Balaifal argued this point for some time and then decided to let us have our way — for a moment. Then she tried again, but we wouldn't do it. Pandro said we'd move the organ any time, or anything else like that, but we wouldn't get down on our knees.

Well, Miss Balaifal said, will you close your eyes?

What for? Pandro said.

It's customary for everybody to close his eyes while someone is praying, Miss Balaifal said,

Who's praying? Pandro said.

No one, *yet*, Miss Balaifal said. But if you'll promise to close your eyes, *I'll* pray, but you've got to promise to close your eyes.

What do you want to pray for? Pandro said.

I want to pray for you boys, she said.

What for? Pandro said.

A little prayer for you won't do any harm, Miss Balaifal said. Will you close your eyes?

Oh! all right, Pandro said.

We closed our eyes and Miss Balaifal prayed.

It wasn't a little prayer by a long shot.

Amen, she said. Now, boys, don't you feel better?

In all truth, we didn't.

Yes, we do, Pandro said. Can we go now, Miss Balaifum? Any time you want the organ moved, we'll move it for you.

Sing for all you're worth, Miss Balaifal said to me, and turn away from any evil companions who invite you to drink.

Yes, ma'am, I said.

You know where the church is, she said.

What church? I said.

The Tulare Street Presbyterian Church, she said.

I know where it is, I said.

Mr. Sherwin will be expecting you Sunday morning at nine-thirty, she said.

Well, it just seemed like I was cornered.

Pandro went with me to the church on Sunday, but refused to stand with the choirboys and sing. He sat in the last row of the church and watched and listened. As for myself, I was never more unhappy in my life, although I sang.

Never again, I told Pandro after it was all over.

The following Sunday I didn't show up of course, but that didn't do any good, because Miss Balaifal got us into her house again, played the organ, sang, made us try to sing, prayed, and was unmistakably determined to keep me in the Boys' Choir. I refused flatly, and Miss Balaifal decided to put the whole thing on a more worldly basis.

You have a rare Christian voice, she explained. A voice needed by religion. You yourself are deeply religious, although you do not know it yet. Since this is so, let me ask you to sing for *me* every Sunday. I will *pay* you.

How much? Pandro said.

Fifty cents, Miss Balaifal said.

We usually sang four or five songs. It took about half an hour altogether, although we had to sit another hour while the preacher delivered his sermon. In short, it wasn't worth it.

For this reason I could make no reply.

Seventy-five cents, Miss Balaifal suggested.

The air was stuffy, the preacher was a bore, it was all very depressing.

One dollar, Miss Balaifal said. Not a cent more.

Make it a dollar and a quarter, Pandro said.

Not a cent more than a dollar, Miss Balaifal said.

He's got the best voice in the whole choir, Pandro said. *One* dollar? A voice like that is worth *two* dollars to any religion.

I've made my offer, Miss Balaifal said.

There are other religions, Pandro said.

This, I must say, upset Miss Balaifal.

His voice, she said bitterly, is a Christian voice, and what's more it's Presbyterian.

The Baptists would be glad to get a voice like that for two dollars, Pandro said.

The Baptists! Miss Balaifal said with some — I hesitate to say it — contempt.

They're no different than the Presbyterians, Pandro said.

One dollar, Miss Balaifal said. One dollar, and your name on the programme.

'I don't like to sing, Miss Balaifal, I said.

Yes, you do, she said. You just think you don't. If you could see your face when you sing — why —

He's got a voice like an angel, Pandro said.

I'll fix you, I told Pandro in Armenian.

That's no one-dollar voice, Pandro said.

All right, boys, Miss Balaifal said. A dollar and fifteen cents, but no more.

A dollar and a quarter, Pandro said, or we go to the Baptists.

All right, Miss Balaifal said, but I must say you drive a hard bargain.

Wait a minute, I said. I don't like to sing. I won't sing for a dollar and a quarter or anything else.

A bargain is a bargain, Miss Balaifal said.

I didn't make any bargain, I said. Pandro did. Let *him* sing.

He *can't* sing, Miss Balaifal said.

I've got the worst voice in the world, Pandro said with great pride.

His poor voice wouldn't be worth ten cents to anybody, Miss Balaifal said.

Not even a nickel, Pandro said.

Well, I said, I'm not going to sing — for a dollar and a quarter or anything else. I don't need any money.

You made a bargain, Miss Balaifal said.

Yes, you did, Pandro said.

I jumped on Pandro right in Miss Balaifal's parlour and we

began to wrestle. The elderly Christian lady tried to break it up, but since it was impossible to determine which of us was the boy with the angelic voice, she began to pray. The wrestling continued until most of the furniture in the room had been knocked over, except the organ. The match was eventually a draw, the wrestlers exhausted and flat on their backs.

Miss Balaifal stopped praying and said, Sunday then, at a dollar and a quarter.

It took me some time to get my breath.

Miss Balaifal, I said, I'll sing in that choir only if Pandro sings too.

But his voice, Miss Balaifal objected. It's horrible.

I don't care what it is, I said. If I sing, he's got to sing too.

I'm afraid he'd ruin the choir, Miss Balaifal said.

He's got to go up there with me every Sunday, I said, or nothing doing.

Well, now, let me see, Miss Balaifal said.

She gave the matter considerable thought.

Suppose he goes up and stands in the choir, Miss Balaifal said, but *doesn't* sing? Suppose he just *pretends* to sing?

That's all right with me, I said, but he's got to be there all the time.

What do I get? Pandro said.

Well, now, Miss Balaifal said, I surely can't be expected to pay you too.

If I go up there, Pandro said, I've got to be paid.

All right, Miss Balaifal said. One dollar for the boy who sings; twenty-five cents for the boy who doesn't.

I've got the worst voice in the world, Pandro said.

You must be fair, Miss Balaifal said. After all, you won't be singing. You'll just be standing there with the other boys.

Twenty-five cents isn't enough, Pandro said.

We got off the floor and began re-arranging the furniture.

All right, Miss Balaifal said. One dollar for the boy who sings. Thirty-five cents for the boy who doesn't.

Make it fifty, Pandro said.

Very well, then, Miss Balaifal said. A dollar for *you*. Fifty cents for *you*.

We start working next Sunday? Pandro said.

That's right, Miss Balaifal said. I'll pay you here after the services. Not a word of this to any of the other boys in the choir.

We won't mention it to anybody, Pandro said.

In this manner, in the eleventh year of my life, I became, more or less, a Presbyterian — at least every Sunday morning. It wasn't the money. It was simply that a bargain had been made, and that Miss Balaifal had her heart set on having me sing for religion.

As I began to say six or seven minutes ago, however, a curious thing about our country is the ease with which all of us — or at least everybody I know — are able to change our religions, without any noticeable damage to anything or anybody. When I was thirteen I was baptized into the Armenian Catholic Church, even though I was still singing for the Presbyterians, and even though I myself was growing a little sceptical, as it were, of the whole conventional religious pattern, and was eager, by hook or crook, to reach an understanding of my own, and to come to terms with Omnipotence in my own way. Even after I was baptized, I carried in my heart a deep discontent.

Two months after I was baptized my voice changed, and my contract with Miss Balaifal was cancelled — which was a great relief to me and a terrible blow to her.

I was born a Catholic. I was not baptized until I was thirteen. At that time I had been a Presbyterian for almost two years of Sundays. After being baptized my voice changed. I stopped being a Presbyterian. As for the Armenian Catholic Church on Ventura Avenue, I went there only on Easter and Christmas. All the rest of the time I moved from one religion to another, and in the end was none the worse for it, so that now, like most Americans, my faith consists in believing in every religion, including my own, but without any ill-will toward anybody, no matter what he believes or disbelieves, just so his personality is good.

Main Currents of American Thought

BY IRWIN SHAW

(From *The New Yorker*)

'FLACKER: All right now, Kid, now you'd better talk,' Andrew Draper dictated. 'Business: sound of the door closing, the slow turning of the key in the lock. Buddy: You're never going to get me to talk, Flacker. Business: sound of a slap. Flacker: Maybe that'll make you think different, Kid. Where is Jerry Carmichael? Buddy (laughing): Wouldn't you like to know, Flacker? Flacker: Yeah. (Slowly, with great threatening in his voice) And I'm going to find out. One way or another. See? Business: siren fades in, louder, then fades out. Announcer: Will Buddy talk? Will Flacker force him to disclose the whereabouts of the rescued son of the Railroad King? Will Dusty Blades reach him in time? Tune in Monday at the same time etcetera etcetera —'

Andrew dropped on to the couch and put his feet up. He stretched and sighed as he watched his secretary finish scratching the dictation down in her shorthand notebook. 'There's another thirty bucks,' he said. 'Is it the right length?'

'Uh huh,' she said. 'Eleven and a half pages. This is a very good one, Andy.'

'Yeah,' Andrew said, closing his eyes. 'Put it next to *Moby Dick* on your library shelf.'

'It's very exciting,' she said, standing up. 'I don't know what they're complaining about.'

'You're a lovely girl, Lenore.' Andrew put his hands over his eyes and rubbed around and around.

'To-morrow? At ten o'clock?'

'At ten o'clock. Dig me out of the arms of sleep. We shall leave Dusty Blades to his fate for this week and go on with the further adventures of Ronnie Cook and his friends, forty dollars a script. I always enjoy writing "Ronnie Cook" much better

than "Dusty Blades." See what ten dollars does to a man.' He opened his eyes and watched Lenore putting her hat on in the mirror. When he squinted, she was not so plain-looking. He felt very sorry for Lenore, plain as sand, with her flat-coloured face and her hair pulled down like a rope, and never a man to her name. She was putting on a red hat with a kind of ladder arrangement up one side. It looked very funny and sad on her. Andrew realized that it was a new hat. 'That's a mighty fine hat,' he said.

'I thought a long time before I bought this hat,' Lenore said, flushing because he'd noticed it.

'Harriet!' the French governess next door screamed, in the alley outside, at the next door's little girl. 'Harriet, get away from there this minute.'

Andrew turned over on his stomach on the couch and put a pillow over his head. 'Have you got any ideas for "Ronnie Cook and His Friends" for to-morrow?' he asked.

'No. Have you?'

'No.'

'You'll get them by to-morrow,' she said. 'You always do.'

'Yeah,' said Andrew. 'God-damn Ronnie Cook and his god-damn friends.'

'You need a vacation,' Lenore said. 'Good-bye. Get a good night's sleep.'

'Anything you say.'

Andrew watched her with one eye as she went off the porch on which he worked and through the living-room and dining-room toward the stairs. Then he closed his eyes and tried to sleep. The sun came in through the open windows, and the curtains blew softly over his head, and the sun was warm and comforting on his closed eyes. Across the street, on the public athletic field, four boys were shagging flies. There would be the neat, pleasant crack of the bat and a long time later the smack of the ball in the fielder's glove. The tall trees outside, as old as Brooklyn, rustled from time to time as little spurts of wind swept across the baseball field.

'*Harriet!*' the governess called. 'Stop that or I will make you stand by yourself in the corner all afternoon! *Harriet!* I demand you to stop!'

The little girl cried, 'Mamma! Mamma! Mamma, she's going to hit me!'

The little girl hated the governess and the governess hated the little girl and they continually reported each other to the little girl's mother.

'You are a little liar!' the governess screamed. 'You will grow up and you will be a liar all your life. There is no hope for you.'

'Mamma!' wailed the little girl.

They went inside the house and it was quiet again.

'Charlie,' one of the boys yelled, 'hit it to me, Charlie!'

The telephone rang four times, and then Andrew heard his mother talking into it.

'It's a man from the bank,' she called to him. 'He wants to talk to you.'

'You should've told him I wasn't home,' Andrew said.

'But you are home,' his mother said. 'How was I to know that —'

'You're right.' Andrew swung his legs over the side of the couch and sat up. 'You're perfectly right.' He went into the dining-room to the telephone.

'You're a hundred and eleven dollars overdrawn,' said the man at the bank.

Andrew squinted at his mother, sitting across the room on a straight chair with her arms folded in her lap, her head turned just a little, so as not to miss anything.

'I thought I had about four hundred dollars in the bank,' Andrew said into the phone.

'You're a hundred and eleven dollars overdrawn.'

Andrew sighed. 'I'll check it.' He hung up.

'What's the matter?' his mother asked.

'I'm a hundred and eleven dollars overdrawn,' he said.

'That's shameful,' his mother said. 'You ought to be more methodical.'

Andrew started back to the porch.

'You're awfully careless,' his mother said, following him. 'You really ought to keep track of your money.'

'Yes.' Andrew sat down on the couch.

'Give me a kiss,' his mother said.

'Why?'

'No particular reason.' She laughed.

'O.K.' He kissed her and she held him for a moment. He lay back on the couch. She ran her finger under his eye.

'You've got rings under your eyes,' she said.

'That's right.'

She kissed him again and went away.

He closed his eyes. From the rear of the house came the sound of the vacuum cleaner. He got up and went to his mother's bedroom. She was down on one knee and bent over, running the machine back and forth under the bed.

'Hey!' Andrew yelled. 'Hey, Mom!'

She turned off the machine and looked up at him. 'What's the matter?'

'I'm trying to sleep,' he said.

'Well, why don't you sleep?'

'The vacuum cleaner. It's shaking the house.'

His mother stood up, her face setting into stern lines. 'I can't use it while you're working. I can't use it while you're reading. I can't use it until ten o'clock in the morning because you're sleeping.' She started the machine. 'When am I supposed to clean the house?' she called over the noise of the cleaner. 'Why don't you sleep at night, like everybody else?' And she put her head down low and vigorously ran the machine back and forth.

Andrew watched her for a moment. Then he went out of the room, closing the door behind him.

The telephone was ringing again, and he picked it up and said, 'Hello.'

'Ahndrew?' his agent's voice asked. His agent was from Brook-

lyn, too, but he had a very broad 'a', with which he impressed actors and sponsors.

'Yes, this is Ahndrew.' Andrew always made this straight-faced little joke with his agent, but the agent never seemed to catch on. 'The "Dusty Blades" scripts are all through. You'll get them to-morrow.'

'I called about something else, Ahndrew. The complaints're piling up on the "Blades" scripts. They're as slow as gum. Nothing ever happens. Ahndrew, you're not writing for the *Atlantic Monthly*.'

'I know I'm not writing for the *Atlantic Monthly*.'

'I think you've rather run out of material,' his agent said lightly, soothingly. 'I think perhaps you ought to take a little vacation from the "Blades" scripts.'

'Go to hell, Herman!' Andrew said, knowing that his agent had found somebody to do the scripts more cheaply for him.

'That's hardly the way to talk, Ahndrew,' Herman said. 'After all, I have to stand in the studio and listen to the complaints.'

'Sad, Herman,' Andrew said. 'That's a sad picture,' and hung up.

He rubbed the back of his neck reflectively, feeling the little lump behind his ear. Then he went into his own room and sat at his desk, looking blankly at the notes for his play, which lay to one side, neatly piled, growing older. He took out his cheque-book and his last month's vouchers and arranged them in front of him.

'One hundred and eleven dollars,' he murmured as he checked back and added and subtracted, his eyes smarting from the strain, his hands shaking a little because the vacuum cleaner was still going in his mother's room. Out on the athletic field more boys had arrived and formed an infield and were throwing the ball around the bases and yelling at each other.

Dr. Chalmers, seventy-five dollars. That was for his mother and her stomach.

Eighty dollars rent. The roof over his head equalled two 'Ronnie Cook and His Friends'. Five thousand words for rent.

Buddy was in the hands of Flacker. Flacker could torture him for six pages. Then Dusty Blades could be speeding to the rescue with Sam, by boat, and the boat could spring a leak, because the driver was in Flacker's pay, and there could be a fight for the next six pages. The driver could have a gun. It could be used, Andrew decided, but it wouldn't be liked, because he'd written at least four like it already.

Furniture, a hundred and thirty-seven dollars. His mother had always wanted a good dining-room table. She didn't have a maid, she said, so he ought to get her a dining-room table. How many words for a dining-room table?

'Come on, baby, make it two!' the second baseman out on the field was yelling. 'Double 'em up!'

When Andrew was still in college he used to go out on a Saturday at ten o'clock in the morning and shag flies and jump around the infield and run and run all day, playing in pickup games until it got too dark to see. He was always tired now, and even when he played tennis he didn't move his feet right, because he was tired, and hit flatfooted and wild.

Spain, one hundred dollars. Oh, Lord!

A hundred and fifty to his father, to make up the deficit in his pay-roll. His father had nine people on his pay-roll, making little tin gadgets that he tried to sell to the dime stores, and at the end of every month Andrew had to meet the pay-roll. His father always gravely made out a note to him.

Flacker is about to kill Buddy out of anger and desperation. In bursts Dusty, alone. Sam is hurt. On the way to the hospital. Buddy is spirited away a moment before Dusty arrives. Flacker very smooth and oily. Confrontation. 'Where is Buddy, Flacker?' 'You mean the little lad?' 'I mean the little lad, Flacker!' . . .

Fifty dollars to Dorothy's piano teacher. His sister, Dorothy. Another plain girl. She might as well learn how to play the piano. Then one day they'd come to him and say, 'Dorothy is ready for her debut. All we're asking you to do is rent Town Hall for a Wednesday evening. Just advance the money.' She'd never get married. She was too smart for the men who would want her and

too plain for the men she'd want herself. She bought her dresses in Saks. He would have to support, for life, a sister who would only buy her dresses in Saks and paid her piano teacher fifty dollars a month every month. She was only twenty-four. She would have a normal life expectancy of at least forty years. Twelve times forty, plus dresses at Saks and Town Hall from time to time. . . .

His father's teeth, ninety dollars. The money it cost to keep a man going in his losing fight against age.

The automobile, nine hundred dollars. A nine-hundred-dollar cheque looked very austere and impressive, like a penal institution. He was going to go off in the automobile, find a place in the mountains, write a play. Only he could never get himself far enough ahead on 'Dusty Blades' and 'Ronnie Cook and His Friends'. Twenty thousand words a week, each week, recurring like Sunday on the calendar. How many words was *Hamlet*? Thirty, thirty-five thousand?

Twenty-three dollars to Best's. That was Martha's sweater for her birthday. 'Either you say yes or no,' Martha had said last Saturday night. 'I want to get married and I've waited long enough.' If he got married, he would pay rent in two places, light, gas, telephone.

Flacker played with something in his pocket. Dusty's hand shoots out, grabs Flacker's wrist, pulls his hand out. Buddy's little penknife, which Dusty had given him for a birthday present, is in Flacker's hand. 'Flacker, tell me where Buddy Jones is or I'll kill you with my bare hands.' A gong rings. Flacker has stepped on an alarm. Doors open and the room fills with his henchmen. . . .

Twenty dollars to Macy's for books. Parrington's *Main Currents of American Thought*. How does Dusty Blades fit into the *Main Currents of American Thought*?

Ten dollars to Dr. Faber. 'I don't sleep at night, Doctor. Can you help me?'

'Do you drink coffee, Mr. Draper?'

'I drink one cup of coffee in the morning. That's all.'

Pills, to be taken before retiring. Ten dollars.

If he married, he would take an apartment downtown, because it would be silly to live in Brooklyn this way, and he would buy furniture, four rooms full of furniture, beds, chairs, dish-rags, relatives. Martha's family was poor and getting no younger and finally there would be three families, with rent and clothes and doctors and funerals.

Andrew got up and opened the closet door. Inside, stacked in files, were the scripts he had written in the last four years. They stretched from one wall of the wide closet across to the other — a million words. Four years.

Next script. The henchmen close in on Dusty. He hears Buddy screaming in the next room. . . .

How many years more?

The vacuum cleaner roared.

Martha was Jewish. That meant he'd have to lie his way into some hotels if he took her to them at all and he never could escape from one particular meanness of the world around him.

He sat down at his desk. One hundred dollars again to Spain. Barcelona had fallen and the long, dusty lines had beaten their way to the French border with the planes over them. And out of a sense of guilt at not being on a dusty road himself, bloody-footed and in fear of death, he had given a second hundred dollars, feeling at the same time that it was too much and nothing he ever gave could be enough. Three and a third 'The Adventures of Dusty Blades' to the dead and dying of Spain.

The world loads you day by day with new burdens that increase on your shoulders. Lift a pound and you find you're carrying a ton. 'Marry me,' she says, 'marry me.' Then what does Dusty do? What the hell can he do that he hasn't done before? For five afternoons a week now, for a year, Dusty has been in Flacker's hands, or the hands of somebody else who is Flacker but has another name, and each time he has escaped, but now how?

The vacuum cleaner roared in the hallway outside his room.

'Mom!' he yelled. 'Please turn that thing off!'

'What did you say?' his mother called.

'Nothing.'

He added up the bank balances. His figures showed that he was four hundred and twelve dollars overdrawn instead of one hundred and eleven dollars, as the bank said. He didn't feel like adding the figures over. He put the vouchers and the bank's sheet into an envelope for his income-tax returns.

'Hit it out, Charlie!' a boy called on the field. 'Make it a fast one!'

Andrew felt suddenly like going out and playing with them. He changed his clothes and put on a pair of old spiked shoes that were lying in back of the closet. His old pants were tight on him. Fat. If he ever let go, if anything happened and he couldn't exercise, he'd get as big as a house. Maybe Dusty has a knife in a holster up his sleeve. How plant that? The rent, the food, the piano teacher, the people at Saks who sold his sister dresses, the nimble girls who painted the tin gadgets in his father's shop, the teeth in his father's mouth, the doctors, the doctors, all living on the words that would have to come out of his head . . . See here, Flacker, I know what you're up to. Business: Sound of a shot. A groan. Hurry, before the train gets to the crossing! Look! He's gaining on us! Hurry! Will he make it? Will Dusty Blades head off the desperate gang of counterfeiters and murderers in the race for the yacht? Will I be able to keep it up? Andrew asked himself. The years, the years ahead . . . He would grow fat and the lines would become permanent under his eyes and he'd drink too much and pay more to the doctors because death was nearer and there was no stop, no vacation from life, because in no year could he say, 'I want to sit this one out. Kindly excuse me.'

His mother opened the door. 'Martha's on the phone.'

Andrew clattered out in his spiked shoes, holding the old, torn fielder's glove. He closed the door to the dining-room to show his mother this was going to be a private conversation.

'Hello,' he said. 'Yes.' He listened gravely. 'No,' he said. 'I guess not. Good-bye. Good luck, Martha.' He stood looking at the phone after he had put it down. His mother came in and he picked up his glove and started down the steps.

'Andrew,' she said, 'could you spare fifty dollars?'

'Oh, God!'

'It's for Dorothy. She's going to a party, a very important party —'

'Do the invitations cost fifty dollars apiece?' Andrew kicked the top step and a little piece of dried mud fell off one of the spiked shoes.

'No, Andrew. It's for a dress. She can't go without a new dress, she says. There's a man there she's after.'

'She won't get him, dress or no dress,' Andrew said. 'Your daughter's a very plain girl.'

'I know,' his mother said. Her hands waved a little, helpless and sad. 'But it's better if she at least does the best she can. I feel so sorry for her, Andrew.'

'Everybody comes to me!' Andrew yelled, his voice suddenly high. 'Nobody leaves me alone! Not for a minute!'

He was crying now and he turned to hide it from his mother. She looked at him, surprised, shaking her head. She put her arms around him. 'Just do what you want to do, Andrew, that's all. Don't do anything you don't want to do.'

'Yeah,' Andrew said. 'Yeah. I'm sorry. I'll give you the money. I'm sorry I yelled at you.'

'Don't give it to me if you don't want to, Andrew.'

He laughed a little. 'I want to, Mom, I want to.'

He patted her shoulder and went down toward the baseball field, leaving her standing there, puzzled, at the top of the steps.

The sun and the breeze felt good to him on the baseball field and he forgot for an hour, but he moved slowly. His arm hurt at the shoulder when he threw, and the boy playing second base called him 'Mister', which he wouldn't have done even last year, when Andrew was twenty-four.

Rich Men

BY JESSE STUART

(From *The Atlantic Monthly*)

I

'I DON'T mean to be braggin',' says Pa, 'but Lester, you can ask your Ma there and she can tell you we started from scratch. She can tell you that I've been a sharp trader in livestock. I take it atter my Pap. He ust to be one of the best buyers on Big Sandy. He bought droves of cattle. I remember ridin' a pony and goin' with Pap. We took a big shepherd dog with us. He helped us drive the cattle home. We'd come home sometimes with a hundred head of cattle. When the buyin' in Kentucky got scarce we crossed the Big Sandy and bought cattle in the state of West Virginia.'

Pa rocked in his chair in front of the big fireplace. Ma was knittin' Pa a pair of socks. She listened to Pa talk about cattle buyin'. Sister Nell was poppin' corn over the bright flames that leaped up from the forestick. Ma never said a word when Pa was talkin' about cattle buyin'. She didn't say he was the best trader on Big Sandy. She didn't say he wasn't. Ma only looked at the fire and knitted Pa's socks.

'Lester,' says Pa, 'I want you to be a cattle buyer. I've paid for four thousand acres of land. I've got it in grass. I've got one of the finest grass farms on Big Sandy. I ain't sayin' I'm exactly a rich man. And you can judge from the neighbours around us I ain't a poor man. When they haf to sell a cow to get a little needy money, they know where to come. They know old "Hen" Blaine's got the money. They know when he ain't got it he can mighty quick find it. I'm allus ready to buy and sell cattle. I love the looks of cattle. I allus have a purty drove of cattle around my barn. You know that, son. We ain't been without them since you've been a little shaver and I rocked you on my knee.'

Pa knocked the ashes off his big cigar. Sister Nell finished poppin' the capper of corn. She shoved back the lid. She passed it around to us. The capper of corn didn't go very far. Nine of us got a handful of corn apiece. 'I'll not take any popcorn,' says Pa; 'can't you young'ins see that I'm smokin'?' .

'What do you think about my tradin', Tibithia?' says Pa, looking over at Ma. He was trying to make Ma talk. He wanted Ma to say he was the best trader on Big Sandy.

'I don't think about it,' says Ma. 'I don't think it's a great thing to skin poor people out'n their cattle. I think there'll come a time when you'll reap what you sow. You sit there and brag, and my Pap allus told me that pride comes before a fall. I think you are headin' for a fall.'

Pa took his thumbs down from behind his vest. He looked hard at Ma. Then he turned his head. He looked at the blazin' fire. Pa's black eyes danced in his head. He was riled the way Ma talked to him. He watched Sister Nell shuffle another capper of popcorn over the fire. Ma just kept on knittin' a sock like nothin' had happened. I hated to see Pa mad at Ma. I think she told him the truth. Pa couldn't see himself as others saw him. I didn't know whether he was the greatest livestock trader on Big Sandy or not. No one but Pa had ever told me that he'd swum one hundred head of white-faced cattle from West Virginia across the Big Sandy to Kentucky at one time. After Pa told me this he said the old-timers used to call him Tradin' Hen Blaine. I'd never heard Pa called that in my life.

'I think I'll turn in,' says Pa. 'Seems like any more I'm not a welcome man around my own fireside. Seems like my wife has turned my children on me. I'm one of the most upstandin' men along the Big Sandy River. If I've not made my family a respectable livin', then who has, I'd like to know?'

Pa looked at Ma for an answer. Ma kept on knittin' socks. She never spoke to Pa. Pa walked out of the room. He went in the back room to bed. We stayed up a long time and popped corn. Ma put her knittin' away. She pulled off her glasses and laid them on the stand table. 'Children, it's bedtime,' says Ma.

'Lester, you got to get up at four in the mornin' and help your Pa with all this feedin' before you go to school. You ought to be in bed right now.'

'Yes, Ma,' I says. I went upstairs to bed. I remember I had dreams about cattle. I had dreams about Pa tradin'. I saw whole droves of cattle on the hills. I saw them run away from Kentucky and swim the Big Sandy River to the state of West Virginia. I thought Pa's cattle jumped the fence and run back to West Virginia. I was glad. I wouldn't haf to feed them any longer. Then I thought they come back home and gnawed the bark from the black oak trees. I thought they were so hungry that their sides caved in. I thought when Pa saw them comin' back he stood by the gate and cried because they were so poor. I was dreamin' about Pa's cattle when I heard him say: 'Roll out'n that bed, Lester. It's feedin' time.'

I I

When I got dressed and got downstairs Ma had our breakfast ready. Pa, Ma, and I et our breakfasts together. Ma watched when Pa's coffee cup was empty and she would take the biler and pour Pa more coffee. Pa would wipe his moustache after he took a sip of coffee. He would press it out against his red cheeks with his hands. Then Pa would take more honey and hot biscuits and butter. He would drink coffee with his honey and his buttered hot biscuits. I could allus tell when Pa was ready to get up from the table. That was when he had finished eatin' ten biscuits. He would allus drink four cups of strong black coffee. Then Pa would get up and light his cigar. We would go toward the barn. When Pa got near the barn he laid his cigar on a big stump. He'd never go about the barn smokin'.

We had to fork hay for two hundred head of cattle. Pa had one hundred and fifty white-faced cattle. He had fifty pick-ups of all sorts. 'Scrub cattle,' Pa called them. We kept our cattle on the outside durin' purty winter weather. We didn't have barn room for all of them. When the snow fell, a lot of our cattle laid

in the pine grove around from the barn. We'd carry hay from the stacks and throw it over the fence on patches of briars and brush to keep the cattle from trampin' it under their feet. We'd fork down hay out'n our big barn loft for the cows and cattle we kept in the barn.

Pa walked in front. I could see the fire sparkle on the end of his big cigar when the wind blowed. The frost was white on the ground. The stars were still in the sky. Pa laid his cigar on the big oak stump. We walked in the barn. We climbed the ladder to the barn loft. Pa forked down hay for the stalls on one side of the barn. I forked down hay for the cattle on the other side of the barn. It wasn't daylight yet. We walked out near the pine grove. We had our hay stacked near the fence. We started to fork our hay and pitch it over for the cattle on the other side of the pasture fence. The stars were leavin' the sky now. The wind laid. It was gettin' light enough to see over the pasture fields.

'Pears like,' says Pa, 'I hear a rustlin' in that haystack.'

'Must be the wind,' I says, 'shakin' the hay.'

'No, it ain't no wind,' says a voice. 'You gouged me with that fork!'

'What are you doin' sleepin' in my hay nohow?' says Pa.

A man rolled out and shook the straw from his back. His ragged clothes would barely hang on him. His pants were patched until it looked like another patch couldn't be sewed on. He had a long beard over his face. He had long black chin whiskers. Pieces of brown straw were mixed with his black beard.

'You wouldn't scold a old man that found shelter from the ragin' winds of winter in your haystack, would you?' says the stranger.

'Come to think about it,' says Pa, 'I don't guess I would.'

'What is your name?' says the stranger to Pa.

'Tradin' Hen Blaine,' says Pa, puttin' his thumbs behind his vest and danglin' the watch fob hangin' to his gold watch chain.

'Oh, you are that rich Hen Blaine, ain't you?' says the stranger.

'Some people think I'm a rich man,' says Pa.

'I'm a rich man, too,' says the stranger.

'A rich man?' says Pa. 'Then what are you doin' sleepin' in people's haystacks?'

'I ain't got no good clothes,' he says. 'I couldn't ast to stay in your fine house.'

He took his hands and raked the straw from his beard. Pa bent over and laughed and laughed. Pa started laughin' again. 'A rich man,' Pa would say; then he would laugh and laugh. 'A rich man sleepin' in my haystack!'

'Why, I own big farms,' says the stranger. 'I just love to own land. I'm goin' to live my life on this earth. I'm goin' to die. Then in seven years I'll be back on earth doin' my business!'

'The man's off, Les,' Pa whispered. 'He's a funny old man.' Pa bent over and slapped his knees and laughed. I thought Pa would die laughin'.

'No, I ain't off,' says the stranger. 'I'm in my sound mind. I'm tellin' you the truth. I'll be back here seven years attar I die takin' care o' my business. People won't believe me, but it's the truth. They won't believe I'm a rich man, either.'

'What is your name?' says Pa. 'I don't think I ever heard of you.'

'I don't guess you have heard of me,' says the stranger, 'but you will hear o' me some day. You will hear of me attar I die and come back seven years later to run my farm. My name ain't worth knowin' now, but it will be.'

'Man talks crazy,' says Pa. 'I never heard sich foolish talk.'

'No, I ain't crazy,' he says. 'How many times do I haf to tell you I ain't crazy? I'm just cold from sleepin' all night in your haystack. Why don't you invite me to your house? Why don't you give me a good warm breakfast? That is the way one good neighbour should be with another.'

'I wouldn't have a dirty tramp like you in my house,' says Pa. 'Not only dirty, but you ain't all there in the head!'

'You tell a man straight to his face,' says the ragged stranger. 'You ain't a bit nice. You'll never be back runnin' your purty farm seven years attar you have left this world. You'll be dead as a lizard.'

'So will you, too,' says Pa. 'You look like you have one foot in the grave now and the other one about to slip in!'

'You're so mean to me,' says the strange man.

'Don't talk like that,' I says to Pa.

'Your father is a very rich man,' says the stranger to me. 'I am a very rich man, but your Pa won't believe me. He thinks I'm a tramp.'

'I don't think any more about you,' says Pa. 'Clear out'n here now. I've got to finish feedin' my cattle. I ain't got time to be bothered with you. I have work to do.'

'Have you got cattle?' says the stranger. 'I have cattle. I love cattle. I have big farms filled with cattle. I cheated people to get my cattle. I am a rich man.'

'Cheated people?' says Pa.

'Yes,' says the stranger, 'and you've cheated people. Ain't I heard of you before? You are Tradin' Hen Blaine!'

'Right,' says Pa. 'I'm Tradin' Hen Blaine.'

Pa bristled up. He looked over his frost-covered fields. Pa looked as big as I'd seen him.

'I'd like to walk down to the fence with you and look at your cattle,' says the dirty beardy man.

'Just so you don't fall down, you old plug, you,' says Pa. 'If you do I'll fasten a drag chain around your legs and haul you to the bone yard with the rest of my old plug stock.' Pa laughed and laughed. Pa bent over and laughed at what he had said to the strange man.

'I'll make it, all right,' he says. 'I get happy when I go to look at purty cattle. How many head of cattle do you have?'

'I have two hundred head,' says Pa. 'I have one hundred and fifty white-faced cattle and fifty scrubs.'

'Lord,' says the old man. 'You've cheated a lot of people buyin' that many. You are a great trader. Didn't anybody ever tell you that you cheated fer to buy all these cattle?'

'Yes,' says Pa. 'My wife did.'

The cattle come to the fence for their hay. There is a big drove of them. The woods are full of cattle.

'Go turn the rest of the herd out'n the barn,' says Pa. 'I want a tramp just to see my herd all together. Says he's a rich man. I just want him to see a real herd of cattle.'

'All right, Pa,' I says.

I I I

I run to the barn to turn the cattle out in the pasture. The frost was goin' up in streaks of fog to the mornin' sun. The air was clean and sweet to smell. I run over the frosty road to the barn. When I come back from the barn I saw Pa talkin' to the man with his hands. The old man was leanin' on his cane. He was noddin' 'yes' and 'no' to the words Pa said. He was agreein' with all Pa said. Pa felt pleased. I could tell by the way he put his thumbs behind his vest.

'You have a great herd of cattle,' says the stranger. 'Just what would you take for all that herd of cattle?'

'Oh,' says Pa, 'I've had three buyers already. I was offered \$5500 by one. Another offered me \$5700. The last offer I got was \$6000. I'm holdin' to spring to get my price.'

'Then you sell in the spring,' says the stranger.

'No,' says Pa, 'I buy of a spring and sell in the fall. Then I buy in the winter when people's feed gets scarce. I sell in the spring atter I've wintered the cattle. That is the way I make my money.'

'You're a smart man,' says the old man. I looked at the patches on his pants. I could see the hide through the patches. His flesh was blue. His bowed legs were quiverin' with cold. The cane shook in his tremblin' hands.

'How much would you take fer them cattle?' says the old man.

Pa started laughin'. Pa bent over and laughed and laughed. He lit a new cigar. He puffed smoke and laughed. He pulled at his vest with his thumbs and laughed. 'You wantin' to buy all my cattle?' says Pa.

'I thought you might make me a price,' says the old man.

'Why, I'd sell them to you, if you'd pay me right now,' says Pa, 'fer \$3500.'

Pa started laughin' again.

'Just a minute, Tradin' Hen Blaine,' says the stranger. 'You've just dealt with "Ginsang" Tootle from Bruin. Ain't you heard o' me?'

'Lord, yes,' says Pa, 'I've heard o' Ginsang Tootle. You ain't him, are you?'

The stranger just reached down and started tearin' a patch from the knee of his pants.

'I can give you three one-thousand-dollar bills,' says Ginsang, 'and a five-hundred dollar bill — or I can write you a cheque fer it!'

'You ain't doin' neither,' says Pa. 'I was just jokin'.'

'Oh, yes, you are Tradin' Hen Blaine,' says Ginsang. 'Men don't back out on you when you deal with them. You ain't backin' out on me. People don't do me that way. You've traded with me. I'm drivin' your cattle off.'

Pa's face turned red. His blue eyes got as big as dollars. Pa couldn't speak. Pa had been tricked.

'I've been layin' fer you, Tradin' Hen Blaine,' says Ginsang. 'I heard you'd never been cheated. I heard you'd cheated everybody you'd ever traded with. So I've laid fer you. I laid in your haystack! My helpers are waitin' fer me out by the big road. They have the shepherd dogs and the horses. I ain't been in your haystack all night.'

'But I'm a ruined man,' says Pa. 'I'm a ruined man, for all I have is in my cattle.'

'You're a rich man,' says Ginsang, 'and I'm a rich man. We are both rich men. You know how I got my start?'

'No,' says Pa, 'and I don't care.'

'I laid before a man's fire one whole week and carried a little mattock through the woods and dug ginsang. One mornin' I got him to price his cattle. I had the money ready. I took 'em. He tried to back out like you did. But I wouldn't let him no more than I would let you. I got the name of "Ginsang" atter that. So I'm Ginsang Tootle from Bruin Creek. Remember me by that name?'

'I remember you, Ginsang Tootle,' I says. 'Don't you bring

your cattle to the Grant Store at Crossroads and get a load of things every fall before bad weather sets in?’

‘I do,’ he says.

‘I was over there when storekeeper Reece Setser made you a present of a hat if you would throw your old one away. You’d bought three hundred dollars’ worth of stuff from him and had it loaded on your cattle wagon. When you drove away you stopped your cattle and went over the bank and got your old hat, didn’t you?’

‘I did,’ says Ginsang. ‘I’m the man.’

‘You didn’t have a long beard then,’ I says.

‘No,’ says Ginsang, ‘I growed it so your Pa wouldn’t know me. I come to cheat him like he has cheated everybody else. Death is goin’ to cheat me, but I feel like I can uptrip him. That is why I’m building my house now and havin’ furniture put in it. I’ll be back in seven years doin’ business. I’ll be back buyin’ cattle on the Big Sandy River. I can’t stand to leave this river.’

‘Then you did mean what you said a while ago,’ says Pa.

‘I ain’t told you no lies,’ says Ginsang. ‘I own land and cattle and I am a very rich man. It is easier fer me to tell the truth. I can do what I want to do when I tell the truth. It sounds like a lie to everybody. You are one of the best traders on Big Sandy River. But I’ve uptripped you.’

‘You don’t haf to say it. I’ll come again. I’ll beat you if my spirit has to trade with your spirit in another land.’

‘I must get my cattle,’ says Ginsang. ‘I must be on my way. Just turn them out’n the pasture and start them down the road. I’ll feel big behind them.’

I opened the gate. Ginsang walked away with Pa’s big herd of cattle. The road was filled with cattle. Ginsang walked behind — his patched pants would hardly stay on his skinny body. His beard fell to his waist.

I V

‘Why, the man fooled me,’ Pa said to Ma. ‘He acted crazy. Talked about comin’ back to this earth seven years attar he had

died to start buyin' cattle again. He worked me into a trap. I thought he was a tramp.'

'Ain't you never heard of old Ginsang Tootle?' says Ma. 'He had a house built and filled with furniture for him and his wife. He thinks and has her believin' they're comin' back attter they have been dead seven years. He's the one that cheated old Fonse Leadingham out'n all his cattle. Stayed there a week and slept like a dog before the fire. Run over the hills and dug ginsang. Asked Fonse what he would take for his cattle. Got him to set a cheap price. Ripped a patch from his pants leg — shelled out the money and bought 'em right there.'

'I'm a poor man to-night,' says Pa. 'It just took the wind out'n me to lose my cattle like that.'

Pa didn't smoke a cigar. Pa didn't brag. Pa looked downhearted.

'You'll haf to be more careful,' says Ma. 'Watch who sleeps in your haystacks from this on. Everything you've told me that he told you is the truth. How could he fool you that way, Henry?'

'Th' long beard on his face,' says Pa, 'or I'd a knowed him. Then he started talkin' about bein' a rich man — and that he would die and in seven years he'd be back to run his farm. I thought he was crazy. I thought he was a tramp. I didn't know I's talkin' to Ginsang Tootle.'

'Wolves will come to you dressed in sheep's clothin',' says Ma.

'Yes,' says Pa. 'That wolf in sheep's clothin' has made me a poor man. But I'll come again. I can see a hundred head of white-faced cattle swimmin' the Big Sandy River. I'll beat him yet. I'll cheat him if my spirit has to cheat his spirit in another world!'

Ma looked at Pa and laughed. Pa lit his cigar. He put his thumbs behind his vest.

'Tradin' Hen Blaine,' says Pa; 'still the best trader on the Big Sandy River.'

Night and the Lost Armies

BY BENEDICT THIELEN

(From *The Atlantic Monthly*)

As the sun set the sea became like a great sheet of purple silk, a canopy spread out for some magnificent event which was taking place beneath its surface. From time to time it rippled slightly, as though lifted by the breaths or by the gestures beneath it of many people in unison. Where the small waves fell with a short lapping sound on the shore the foam edged it with a border that was white and delicate as fine lace. Above, the sky was hung with trappings of scarlet and gold.

Groups of men walked slowly away from the shining water — five men together, ten, twenty, coming together into larger groups, one hundred, going toward the fires that were being built farther back on the shore, flowing together, five hundred, toward the fires that were being lighted against the night, the hum of their voices, a thousand, rising with the rising darkness, five thousand.

'But not for ever. We can't stay here for ever.'

'Where will we go? They can't send us back.'

'That would be sending us back to die.'

'What do they care?'

'They are human. Many of them think as we do.'

'It costs them millions of francs a day to keep us here.'

'If we had won —'

'If . . . if —'

'When . . . when —'

'Mother of God, stop that coughing!'

'He can't help it. He's sick.'

'If he'd stop . . . Why doesn't he die? If he'd stop —'

'If . . . if . . . when . . . when —'

Ten thousand voices.

And it was strange, because it was the hour and a place where you would expect to be alone. Over all the world on shores like this people have sat alone, listening to the silence, lost in the half-thoughts of the dusk. People have sat by such shores, by this shore, and felt the first touch of night and seen the slow rise and fall of the great silk canopy that hides the stirrings and the breathings of the sea's depths. At such times a single figure has walked slowly along at the water's edge, pausing sometimes to look down at a tuft of seaweed or held for a moment by the fleeting iridescence on the fragment of a shell. On a beach like this, on this beach, a single figure has often stayed until the night came, then turned and gone back across the sand toward a light burning in a house beyond the level fields. One man has often walked slowly, shadowed by the dark wings of his twilight thoughts, wrapped in the impenetrable mystery of his alien self.

All this men have told about. All this has been written in books. Men have sat reading a book by the falling light in which these things were written. Their eyes lowered against the band of red that hung across the face of the sky, they have read the words slowly to themselves, then put one finger between the covers of the book and closed it. They have raised their heads and looked up from the words which had been written about one man's suffering, about the questing of one lost and desolate mind. They have raised their heads to see their own reflections mirrored in the sky, still to hear the echo of the words murmured by the sea and by the wind in the dry grass by the side of the road. The world has given back to them with a kind of comfort the voice of their melancholy and the burden of their grief.

We have told of man against the world. We have sung the song of the sickle in the field, the spade in the mine, the axe against the tree, the plough in the furrow. We have written of pity for one woman's sorrow and of suffering with one man's pain. We have wept for the memory of love and death's quick forgetting. We have walked alone beside a barren shore at dusk. We have raised our eyes and seen blood smeared across the sky and known that it is less bright than the blood that will flow, unseen, and to the end

of time, from our own hearts. We have walked in solitude across the darkening fields. We have looked up again and still seen only ourselves and our own wounds in the gashed and bleeding sky.

But on this shore were fifty thousand men. Some walked slowly, without hurry, because there was no place for them to go. Some stood and looked up at the sky. Their figures were pasted flat against the red sky, like images cut from paper. Some waded in the still water, bent over, their arms thrust down, searching for food in the shallows. Many lay upon the sand. Above the edge of the horizon the red sun glared straight into their eyes. Their eyes were red and swollen from the wind-blown sand. Those that could move turned from the sun and crept into their tents. The tents were sticks covered with a blanket or a piece of sacking. Those that had no tents dug holes for themselves in the sand. They burrowed shelters for themselves beside the crabs, the spiders, and the worms. They hid themselves and their vermin in holes in the ground. Many were carried to holes that others had dug for them.

Now with darkness fires sprang up on the beach. The separate spots of light glowed warmly, like lights from the window of a house across the fields. Fifty thousand men could think together of a window toward which they had walked across the darkening fields, each window different and each window the same. Their thoughts could fill the darkness, and the silence of their closed lips could fill the darkness with the voice of their thoughts. Fifty thousand men sitting by a fire could walk across the fields toward a light, fifty thousand men could feel the weight of the scythe across their shoulders and the glow of the flesh on their necks from the long day of harvest sun. One hundred thousand men could speak together through closed lips.

'When I returned she stood there by the door, her white arms folded and the flour still on them, on each fine dark hair of her round arms. The warm smell of the bread came from the oven. There was a smell of earth and bread in Catalonia and Andalucia. (What is this place again, what do they call it? Argelès. Crack this bread with a hammer, pave the street with it. But we are lucky to

get anything. Where would we go if we left here? Think how many francs a day it costs them to feed us — just for this one loaf of bread, this handful of dried beans. Where are we going?) The smell of the hay came across the fields, far from the sea, sweet and dry, filling her hair. My wife and my house smelt of hay and new bread. (Here now, with night, the wind changes as the sun sinks, and mingled with the hard salt of the sea there is the stink of soured sweat and open latrines and of heroes' dying.) From the barn came the hollow thump of my horse's hoofs on the wooden floor. (We have eaten our horses. Those that we could not eat — those that were sick or wounded, already rotting while still alive, like us — lie in ditches, their hoofs in the air, bloated like grotesque balloons, like toys for the children of giants. Their slow corruption wreathes a garland above our heads, a crown of honour for soldiers.) On the table there were olives and behind me on the wall hung a skin filled with wine. Then the darkness fell over the earth, and over me and over her, lying by my side. (There will be peace again, they told us, when the tyrant is overthrown; there will be peace and plenty'.)

The light was gone from the sky and the great revolving wheel of night rolled slowly forward, pressing its dark furrow across the earth. It scattered the dust of its passing in soft oblivion for some, it seized the bodies of others and racked them with the madness of its whirling, the wild unrest of its dreams. In the deepening silence the eyeless creatures of the night crawled out from under stones and out of damp wood to search for food. In the chill wind, men and their vermin crawled more deeply into the hollows in which they lived.

Two hundred thousand men can speak together with a single unheard voice.

'I never saw the sea before, and now that I've seen it, well, I don't like it. I like it better at home. (Iowa, Dakota, Illinois.) When I came home at night she'd have the beer out on a tray — because she knew I didn't like it right out of the icebox; it was too cold that way — and we'd sit around there and have a couple, and then she'd fry up some hamburgers or maybe a good thick

steak with French-fried potatoes and we'd have some more beer. I'd give some to my dog, too, and we'd laugh, every time. I'll bet you never heard of a dog that liked beer. But this one did. He was some dog. He was an Airedale and his name was Jerry. (What in hell's the name of this place again? St. Nazaire. Yeah, don't it ever stop raining, though? The mud's like chocolate pudding.) And sometimes she'd make that too, and she could make it, let me tell you. She was a good cook. (But there's no chocolate pudding now. The nearest thing to it is the stuff they gave us before they took the X-rays. Bismuth, they call it, and it's flavoured with chocolate.) And we'd get in the old bus some summer evenings and we'd drive out, straight out over the prairie, and there'd be this sunset, and there'd be a breeze out there, cooler than back in the house. (We'd go back there, they told us, just as soon as we did our job over here, just as soon as we saved civilization, we'd go back there, they said. And after that there wouldn't never be no more wars and everything would be better than ever.) But it's not so bad right now. Back there, I mean. You know how it is, open, and nothing but sky above you and maybe a sunset, and this breeze coming over the wheat so it looks like waves, rippling, only better than waves, warmer and not cold and wet like this ocean here. You feel good. You know how it is back there. You feel good, and free, sort of. Nothing's holding you down. Some nights in the car out there on the prairie it's almost like you're flying, you and her together. You feel good, and free, sort of. (Listen to them out there in the street outside the hospital, still singing their heads off, "Where do we go from here, boys, where do we go from here?")'

One by one, the black velvet layers of silence were piled upon the earth. The canopy which hid the sea's depths scarcely stirred beneath the weight of the night. The sound of the ripples on the shore was no more than a faint breathing, a faint rhythmic rise and fall, like a clock which has almost stopped, whose pendulum will soon stop swinging. The wind had left the sky and the stars seemed frozen for ever into place. The men lying on the beach were lost in the motionless blackness between the earth and the

sky. For a brief time the living seemed wrapped in peace. But forgotten armies march in the night.

'They stood by the doors, the women and the children, dim in the rising fog (from Penzance to Inverness), and watched us as we marched away, down to the shore to the ships. The fog swept around them, but behind, through the open doorways, the fires glowed warmly in our homes. As we climbed up the gang-plank I could see my own boat still tied to the jetty. (What is this place — What do they call it? Flanders. Where is he — where is the monster, Bonaparte?) I see her as I come up the hill from my boat, carrying my nets. I see the women sitting by the house doors, mending the nets. At their feet the cats tangle their claws and roll in the fish-smelling nets. I see the women with the baskets on their heads, selling the fish we have caught. I hear the cry of the gulls and the quick regular sound of their wings, like silk rubbed together, as they fly close by overhead. I made a boat for my little boy. It had a sail on it made from a piece of an old skirt of hers. When my boy grew older I could see him sailing my boat into the harbour past the jetty, while I sat with the other old men on the wharf, smoking my pipe, reading the weather in the sky. (But not till the tyrant is dead, not till there is peace again in the world. This is what they tell us'.)

But night does not last for ever, and one by one the stars went out. In the east a slow brush stroke of dark grey was drawn over the black of the sky. A man moved in his sleep. A breath of wind passed over the land. It rustled the dead grasses by the road and for a moment shook a dried seed pod, scattering a few grains of pollen on the ground, then was lost, dissolved by the stillness. The peace of the night was slowly withdrawing from the earth. But it was not yet dawn. The earth had not yet been given back to the living. The voices of the night were still the voices of the dead.

'And it was good to be going back, after all these years. It was good to be returning to Rome. (We are going back to unseat the monster from his throne. When the tyrant, when Nero is dead, there will be peace again in the world and plenty.) I remembered the crowds in the streets and the chariots and the gladiators in

circus and the corn and olives and wine. I saw her treading the grapes with her bare feet and the purple juice running over, the land green with grape leaves and our fingers stained with purple. (Where we marched we stripped the trees and the vineyards for food and for wood to make fires for the cold nights. We chopped the gnarled stems of the vines and burnt them and behind us the land was bare as after a flight of locusts.) In the hot summer sun our hands tilled the ground and pruned the heavy-hanging fruit trees and cared for the grapes hanging in the broad shade of their leaves. Our hands made the land blossom, and the sweat of our bodies watered the fruitful earth. The corn was piled high in the granaries and the bees brought honey to our doors. (Here by the shore, searching for food, we turned over the rocks of the sea and dug in the cold water with our hands, looking for shellfish to eat. There are many men and the sea is big, but the sea is not like the land. The sea does not pour its bounty into your lap with reckless abundance. The sea gives grudgingly of its fruits. These you can eat, but not those. Break those hard shells and the purple juice drips from them, but it is not the purple juice of the grape. This is poison. They gather these and crush them, and from the purple blood they make the dye that stains the robes of emperors. A thousand crawling snails are crushed to edge a robe with purple. This is the Tyrian blood that stains their robes and the high canopies above their heads. But we cannot eat them or drink their blood. This purple on our hands is not for us. It is not food for hungry men.) But they say we are going back to the hillsides, to live for ever in peace and plenty, there where the grapes hang heavy from the vines, where the purple juice spills over from the pressing vats. They say we are going home.'

Thinly at first, like distant chimes, the light crept up above the rim of the sea. The black sand became grey. From a house across the fields there was a cockcrow. The wings of birds moved against the sky with a swift and living rhythm. A fish broke the surface of the water in a golden arch. The lengthening lines of light slid toward the clouds until they touched them and the dawn shattered the grey silence.

Now over all the beach there was the movement of men. Under the golden flaming sky men went toward the sea and waded in to stand knee-deep, bending over, groping with their hands for food in the great purple canopy. The cold waters clamped their wrists with steel bands, iron bars pressed down across their bending backs, and hunger bored in their bellies like a rusted awl. The red sun stared into their red and swollen eyes. The hard rocks tore at their hands, and their own blood mingled with the purple flood. They stirred the cold and sterile waters, while behind them on the shore the sick and the wounded plucked with their fingers at the grains of sand. The murmur of their voices rose with the rising day, subdued at first, then louder, swelling more deeply, rising into the sky, filling it, the voices of the living and of the dying, the hunger of the living and of the dying, and, echoing back from the earth and the sea, the voices of the hundred-million-throated dead.

